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FE'S JOB

GRACE SARTWELL MASON

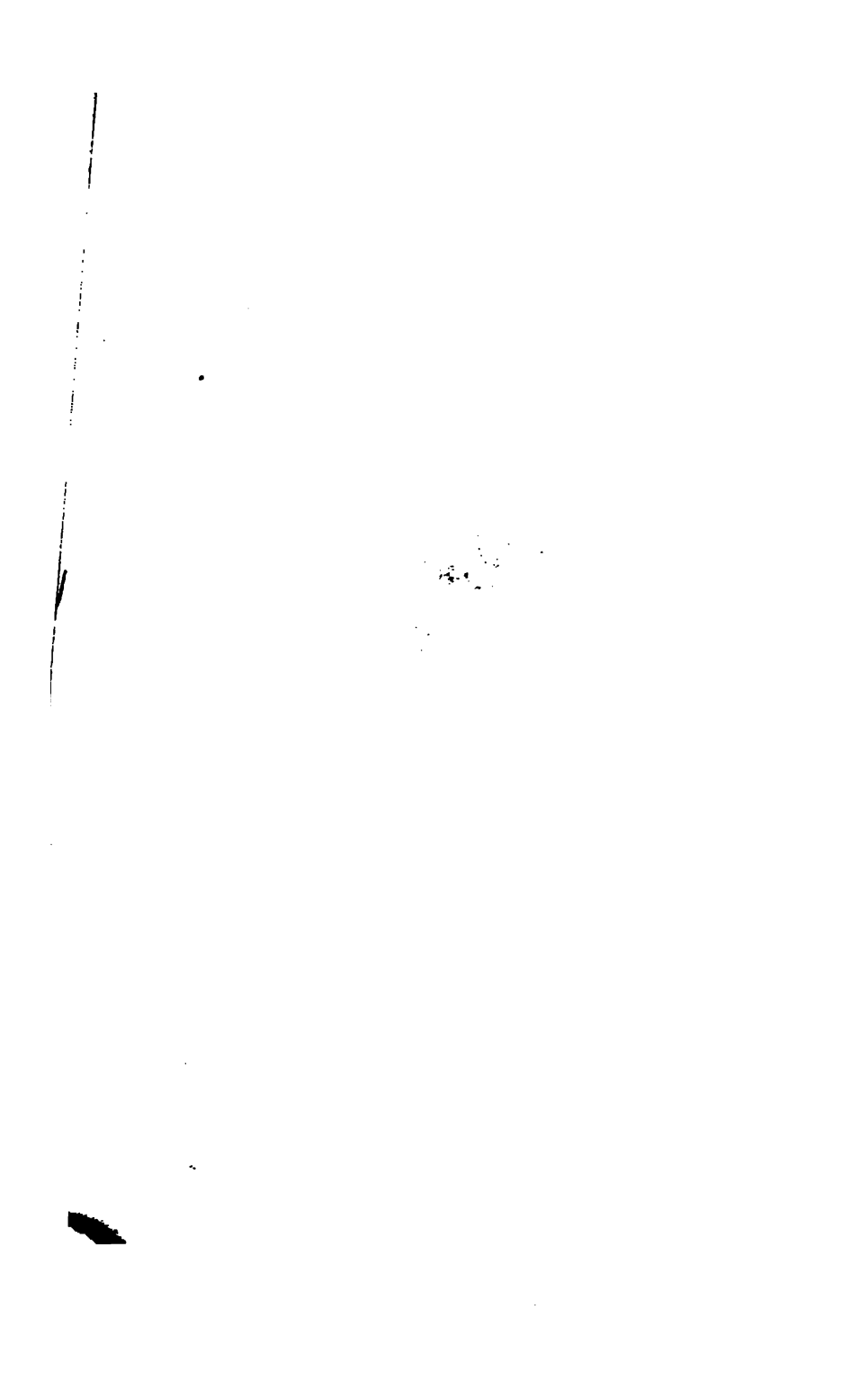
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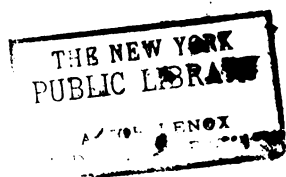
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HIS WIFE'S JOB







— from "The Girl in the Red Dress"

"ANNE, HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO GO TO FRANCE?"

HIS WIFE'S JO

BY
GRACE SARTWELL MASO

AUTHOR OF "THE GOLDEN HOPE," ETC.

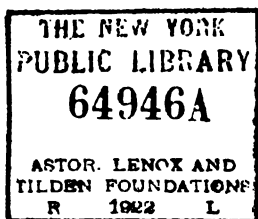


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HIS WIFE'S JOB

CHAPTER I

ANNE HENDERSON did not know it, but for the first time in her life she was squarely and uncompromisingly up against reality.

After having been lodged, fed, clothed and protected, admired, petted and praised in the approved American fashion for twenty-six years, she awoke one morning in the eventful year 1917, to find herself facing a straitened widowhood.

It was not, however, a real widowhood. As her exasperated and practical-minded sister Emma said later, she hadn't even *that* consolation! For she was merely the wife of a misguided man (the adjective was Emma's) who had decided all of a sudden that the only way for him to cut the knot of his difficulties, wipe the slate clean, and start in again was to join the Army.

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His decision had fallen upon his wife out of a clear sky. Roger Henderson came home one night from the office, hung up his hat as usual, complained about the quality of the soup as usual, gave way grudgingly to Anne's reminder that this was Husbands' Night at her bridge club, started to put on the clothes laid out for him; and then, as he tugged at his collar before the mirror, said with an ominous quietness:

"This is the last damnfool thing I do, Anne. I'm going to try for a Commission. If they'll take me I'm going up to Plattsburg next month."

It was queer about Roger Henderson, the way he happened to come to that decision, I mean. And yet — perhaps he came to it as the average man comes upon a great moment, by commonplace, uncomprehended steps, day by day through a number of weeks or months. There was nothing flamboyantly patriotic about Roger. Like the average American man he had, deeply concealed in him, quite a fund of sentiment, but he was horribly afraid of the sentimental gesture. It annoyed him in the theater to

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be obliged to rise every time the Star Spangled Banner was flourished musically, although on these occasions queer sensations crept sheepishly down his spine. He jibed at himself for having these sensations, but they increased in frequency in the early spring of 1917.

For one thing, there was the Wireless on Broadway.

At Times Square, where the roaring lanes converge, was a construction shed, and on this shed the Signal Corps had put up a wireless apparatus. Roger knew it was merely a clever way of advertising the Corps. But every night on his way to the subway he heard the virile song of the sender; every night he saw that uncanny, beautiful blue spark leap out — and something began to stir uneasily in his sluggish city blood. With the careless tides of Broadway flowing past it, the wireless talking away up there seemed to prick some nerve in him that civilization had not yet dulled. It made him want to be moving, somewhere, anywhere, out and away from the walls of offices, from the walls of apart-

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ments, from the roaring canyons of New York. It called to all the adventurous youth in him that still resisted the commonplace tides of maturity.

And then there was the trivial incident of Snubby.

Snubby was a boy in the drafting room of Roger's firm. No one, apparently, knew or cared what was his last name. He was regarded as an unmitigated nuisance because of his habit of breaking into song just when the tension of the day was highest. "Pretty Baby" was his favorite that spring, and he sang it, *con amore*, through his nose. Also he carried a joke book in his pocket and was forever fox-trotting with an imaginary partner held tenderly in his arms down the length of the drafting room. One day he did not report for work as usual at eighty-three, and one of the girl stenographers voiced the general feeling when she said:

"Hope Snubby's joined up with a cabaret!"

But Snubby had joined up with something quite different. One afternoon he appeared in a brand new khaki uniform, with a smile on his face that struck them all as being somehow different from

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the one to which they were accustomed. They all crowded around him and pretended that Snubby in his new rôle of defender of the nation amused them greatly, especially when he declared that he was going to qualify for the Tanks. And when he had left they all snorted appreciatively when some one said:

“ I suppose Snubby will sing to the Germans and they'll fall down dead! ”

But after that a silence fell upon the drafting room. In fact a stillness seemed to descend upon the whole place. The boss turned away from where he had shaken Snubby's hand in farewell and went into his private office, closing the door with a gentleness that was startling. The girl stenographer who had made the remark about Snubby and the cabaret walked to the water cooler without once clicking her heels. And here and there a fellow sat humped over his drawing board making meaningless marks on the paper in front of him.

And into Roger Henderson's mind slowly wandered the thought: “ I wish I was back at Snubby's age.”

Yes, that and the wireless, these two trifles were

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the beginning of the peculiar soreness of the spirit that beset him in the spring of 1917. His inmost thoughts took to following Snubby, as if the adventure of that ebullient youth were secretly his own heart's desire. Another young chap from his department enlisted soon after in the Engineers; nights, now, when he left the office he had to elbow his way through crowds that gathered about the enlistment orators. Their persistent voices followed him, mingling with the raucous voices crying extras, those bulletins that each hour stirred the air into fresh waves of excitement.

This was in the earliest days of the country's great adventure. The city soon ceased to demand an extra an hour; outwardly it went on its way, buying and selling, dancing and making love, overeating and starving, as usual. But, underneath the surface, powerful and subtle waves were being set in motion. Gradually they gained strength, they lengthened out, they crept into every business office and home from the Battery to the Bronx in one form or another; and finally they got at Roger Henderson.

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Deep in that subconscious mind that few men ever explore he had probably made his decision long before he was aware of it; all that was needed to bring it to the surface was some absurd small thing, like Husbands' Night at his wife's Bridge Club. That and the discovery that all his collars were becoming a fraction of an inch too small for him. He looked at himself in the mirror: his waistline was getting a trifle out of bounds too; on his temples his hair was thinning a bit; he did not have to feel of his muscles to know that they were not strictly up to par. He was still in the early thirties; but in that instant he had an extremely unpleasant premonition of what it was going to be like to be middle-aged.

Suddenly something wild, untamed, unhusband-like, broke loose in him. It reared up and sneered at the Bridge Club and all that it stood for; it contemplated with derision those flabby muscles of his; it raged and lashed out against the futility, the monotony and the burdens of his life. And all at once he heard himself saying quietly: "I'm going up to Plattsburg next month."

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Roger and Anne did not go to the Bridge Club that night. The other husbands had to support the occasion without Roger's help, for Anne, when she had finally taken in the full force of his meaning, gave way to something that resembled plain, ordinary hysteria.

It astonished Roger, the way she took his decision, for it had always seemed to him that she was the more patriotic of the two. She had been one of the very first women to knit on the Fifth Avenue busses; she had rolled bandages two afternoons a week; she had been on three war relief committees; and she had caught a frightful cold in tableaux at a war relief bazaar.

But up to this moment War had stood afar off from her. Now it reached out a hand toward something that belonged most intimately to her, something very important and necessary to her, something without which all her well ordered, pleasant life would go to pieces. Her husband! She obeyed the most primal and the least lovely of all the instincts — self-preservation — and fought for

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her own. After about an hour of it Roger knew that he couldn't stand another instant, so he clapped on his hat, and — not having a barn to go to — he went into the street.

That night Roger Henderson did something that few men ever stop long enough in this busy world to do: he walked all around his House of Life, looked in at the windows and then stepped back and sized up the whole structure.

He did not in the least like what he saw. The House was all right — presentable, modern and smart. But its foundations went no deeper than the surface. It struck him — he was savagely depressed — that the first good strong ill wind would blow the whole thing over. Also the furnishings of the House came in for a gloomy scrutiny: and the conclusion he came to was that what was in his House of Life was mostly junk — pretentious junk, at that.

When he left Anne and his own apartment, he had crossed Riverside Drive and followed a little path through the shrubbery until he came to a bench that stood by itself, with the ground dropping away di-

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rectly in front of it and the dark river spread out below. It was very quiet here, no one passing behind him, and in front of him the mysterious gleam of the river, no boats moving at this hour, merely the riding-lights of anchored vessels reflected in the deep wine-colored water. They had some time since begun to crowd the broad bosom of the river, these vessels, freighters, transports, battleships — most of them a dull gray, some of them with a camouflage of wavy stripes on their rusty flanks, each of them awaiting a mysterious word to start forth on its own great adventure. They seemed to Henderson to accent the staleness of his own life.

“What’s the matter with me?” he thought. “Was Anne right when she said I only want adventure, that I am tired of her and home and everything? Or is it that this is the biggest thing I’ll ever have a chance at — and I’ll hate myself forever if I don’t take a chance?”

His thoughts went deeper, into the roots of his own personal life. “What’s the matter with me, anyway? Somewhere I’ve missed a trick. I haven’t got

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within a hundred miles of where I started for when I was twenty-one. What have I done with the last nine years? Precious little, seems to me. Married . . . made a home — if you can call an apartment a home — no children, but that couldn't be helped, in a way — couldn't afford 'em . . . a raft of acquaintances, and not a real friend that's worth while . . . no money saved . . . still on a salary, the boss beginning to look at me with a question mark in his eye . . . a lot of expensive habits. And Anne . . . and Anne . . .”

Here his thoughts winced and shrank away. He did not want to own up even to himself that this night had shown him how far apart he and Anne had allowed themselves to drift.

They had been most deeply and tenderly in love with each other when they married. He had brought her to the city when he got his first good advance of salary with the Leavitt Construction Company. And straightway the city had begun to pour its subtle poison into their veins. It offered them distractions without end. They were young and at-

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tractive and well bred. They made friends easily. They outgrew astoundingly their frugal habits. With each raise in salary their scale of living inched a little higher. Anne's sister Emma, and Anne's best friend, Ada Kent, set a pace that more and more often left Roger and Anne gasping over the discrepancy between salary and current expenses. Not that Anne did much gasping. Before her marriage she had rarely paid one of her own bills, never kept an account, and after marriage she serenely left all that to Roger. She bought and he paid. Sometimes when the bills were outrageously disproportionate to what was coming in he waxed sarcastic, or looked gloomy, or lost his temper according to his mood; and she cajoled or wept according to hers, and the good domestic ship staggered on again.

She knew as much about his work and his ambitions as a kitten knows of algebra. But the fault in this matter was almost fifty-fifty. One of Anne's great attractions for him before they were married had been her butterfly in consequence, her carefree gayety, her innocence and ignorance of a world he



SHE BOUGHT AND HE PAID



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was already beginning to find grimly hard. He had said to himself in those days that he wanted always to shield her from too much knowledge. He did not want her pretty head bothered about the dusty details of his day's work; when he came home at night all he asked of a wife was to look pretty and be cheerful.

But one of life's little ironies lies in the fact that the qualities a man marries for before he is twenty-five are the very qualities that are likely to irritate him when he is thirty. Some time before he reached thirty Roger had begun to look at his wife's engaging little extravagances with a critical eye; he had begun to listen to her dinner conversation with ears that were the least bit bored. It did not soothe his irritation much when Anne reminded him that he liked to see her in good clothes, that he liked the little dinners they gave, and wanted nothing but really good furniture and silver and crystal in their apartment — that little apartment that took so huge a bite from his salary each month. And in the matter of conversation Anne was not really dull. She

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had a quick-glancing mind, but, somehow, there was nothing very stimulating in the nightly retailing of her daily doings. These doings had come to seem to him irritatingly trivial.

He loved her — of course he loved her. He would have given his life to protect her; he thought her the prettiest and sweetest woman among his acquaintances. But — there was no dodging this “but” once he had stared long enough into his House of Life — there was between him and Anne a vague staleness, a faint, increasing sense of irritation, an indefinite disappointment. It was somehow as if they had not quite come up to the promise each had held out to the other at the beginning. Two or three times in the last year they had quarreled rather bitterly. They had always “made up” in a day or two, but the scars remained. The quarrels were generally over the question of the monthly bills, and after each quarrel a conviction rankled in his heart that all a woman wanted a man for, anyway, was the luxuries he could furnish her; it didn’t matter how hard he worked or what he worked at so

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long as he brought home enough to enable her to live the way some other woman lived. A woman was just an ornamental thing outside a man's real, important life — and she was a mighty expensive appendage.

The most unhappy of all their quarrels had occurred after Leavitt, his boss, told him that if he had any money saved there was an opportunity to invest it in a new branch of work the company was taking up. It was an opportunity that meant a first step toward that junior partnership which was the goal of his ambitions. It had seemed to him that there was no real reason why he should not reach that goal very early in his life. He knew that Leavitt liked him personally — he was the kind of well-dressed, pleasant, keen young man whom middle-aged business men like to take out to luncheon and to play golf with on Saturday afternoons. But when Leavitt put the question of his savings to him point blank and he had confessed that his savings at that moment would not have bought a dinner at a first-class restaurant, he saw a queer, cold expression of

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disapproval come into his employer's eyes. It was the first genuine jolt of his life. And that night he had resolved to have that talk with Anne about his business future which he had never before got around to having.

But he was not at all in the right spirit for such a talk. He had been in a bitter and exasperated mood; and they had said things to each other that hurt each of them for a long time afterward.

"Why, Roger Henderson, you're blaming me because you haven't any money saved!" Anne had cried, genuine astonishment in her eyes. "I'm sure I do my best. A man doesn't know how frightfully hard it is, scrimping along on a salary like yours, with our tastes."

"Humph! And a woman doesn't know how 'frightfully hard' it is to pull down a salary, even a salary like mine."

Anne set her lips mutinously. "It doesn't seem to be so awfully hard for some men ——"

"That's right, compare me with your sister's Henry, and that bounder, Kent! Oh, I know you

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think I'm a failure because I can't give you the things they have. I'd like to see a few women like you try to earn your own living — you'd find out it's no picnic."

"You think I'm extravagant and incompetent," she flashed back. "You're always comparing me with Mrs. Lymon — as if I could live in the Bronx and wear the kind of hats Mrs. Lymon wears."

"Well, let me tell you, my dear," Roger smiled grimly, "that no matter what kind of hats she wears, Mrs. Lymon must be a wonder. Lymon gets less salary than I do, but he's managed to save enough — with two children, too — to buy that stock I couldn't buy. I heard that cheerful bit of news before I left this afternoon."

Anne's lips began to quiver. "You think I ought to have had children, and bring them up in — in the slummy places where those Lymons live — and never have any clothes, or know nice people — or go anywhere ——"

And then he said the thing that was to rankle in her mind for a long time to come.

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"I think as a wife you've fallen down on your job, that's what I think," he said grimly.

"Oh!" she gasped, astonishment, anger and pain mingled in her eyes and her voice. "I think you're terribly unjust. And, anyway, if I've fallen down on my job, so have you. Everybody said that in five years you'd be a member of the firm, but you're not, and you needn't blame me, either. You like to have good clothes and belong to an expensive club and play golf, you know you do. You like to have me look nice when I go out with you. And you knew when you married me I had never had any responsibility. I think it's cruel of you to blame me for everything. And you're getting to be just as moody and cranky as you can be!"

They looked at each other with eyes in which there was a gleam that almost resembled hate. Then suddenly Anne cried:

"Oh, Roger, how could we ever say such things to each other? I love you — please forgive me — please, Roger . . ."

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And they were in each other's arms, Anne sobbing, and Roger contritely kissing her hair.

But the scar remained. Neither of them forgot.

The night that Roger walked around his House of Life and looked in at its windows he faced for the first time the true significance of this quarrel, and the other lesser bickerings that had followed in its train. He knew that this was the way marriages went to pieces. A mutual dissatisfaction, first concealed and then gradually coming to the surface in little bickerings, criticisms, resentments. The bloom rubbing off the intimacy of their life. Their tenderness, their delight in each other growing daily less, as the common ground between them became limited to a few commonplace, external facts of life. The common ground between them — they had none, it seemed to him. They had no deep roots such as children give to marriage, they had not even the common ground of property, a home. Without regret or sentiment they shifted apartments every two or three years. And their friends were like their succession

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of abiding places — transitory, delightful at first and quickly wearied of, new ones appearing frequently, and ever more desirable ones on the horizon.

It was so with almost every young couple Roger knew. It was in the air they breathed, the exhilarating, heady air of the city. Something was making them all shallow and restless. It seemed to him to-night that nothing in all their lives was worth the doing. But how could they change? The rut in which they walked was growing deeper, their expensive, shallow habits were formed, a callousness of the spirit was subtly hardening them. It was with a sense of bewildered despair that he sat looking out on the river and the gray vessels swaying mysteriously and silently with the tide.

But, when he turned his back on the river and went home many hours later, there was a sort of peace in his soul. For he had irrevocably made his decision. He was going to war. For the vague and petty harassments, the threatening failure and disappointment of his business and personal life, he was

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going to exchange a grim reality, a high and terrible adventure.

He did not call his motives by any high-sounding name. They were mixed, for he was the average man. He was going because he had come to a sort of blind alley in his affairs. He was going because something of the boy still persisted in him — the boy that had responded to Snubby and to the Wireless on Broadway. He was going because he was capable of feeling those sheepish thrills down his spine when the orchestra played the Star Spangled Banner. He was going because of an anger that had been slowly gathering in him as he read of senseless acts of cruelty. He was going because he wanted to “get into the game.” But — he was going!

CHAPTER II

OF course, not understanding himself and his motives very well, and being almost entirely unable to put them into words, the next few weeks while he was trying to make Anne understand were very difficult.

She declared many times that she was just as patriotic as any other woman — but why should Roger, of all men, want to go to War? It wasn't as if he were young and unmarried, as if he had no responsibilities. Secretly she wished that she had had children; she could have held him with children. And then she was ashamed of herself. She cried a great deal when she was alone, and called herself wicked and selfish, but nevertheless she made a definite effort, at first, to keep him at home.

But one day, when she surprised in his face a faintly contemptuous expression, she stopped in the

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middle of the latest argument she had thought out against his enlisting, and said to herself: "It's no use. I have no power over him. He is going."

She went through, then, a period of bewilderment and fear. What was to become of her? How could she get through the days, how bear the unbearable suspense? And if anything happened to Roger, how should she live? They had not one penny saved. If Roger succeeded in getting an officer's commission, she would have to live on what he could spare her of an officer's pay, which would mean she would have to lower her standard of living. And she hated to think of that. Already her standard had gone a bit too high for their income, and yet she did not see where she could possibly cut down. As for her earning anything for herself, that seemed out of the question. She had been brought up to believe that a woman's natural business is matrimony, and that she needs no other if she is attractive. She was totally unprepared in imagination as well as in attainments for what was about to happen to her.

She never discussed these thoughts of hers with

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Roger, because Roger had settled her future to his own satisfaction. She was to live with her sister Emma who was prosperously married, and who wanted her. He would know that she was safe, and that would mean a tremendous lot to him when he got "over there." It seemed to him a highly satisfactory arrangement. She did not hint to him that she foresaw drawbacks to the plan, for at the last, when Roger had completed his training, received a second Lieutenant's commission, and had come home on brief leave, the best and the sweetest side of Anne came uppermost. They had a few days together that were like a return of the first year of their marriage, when each was determined to let the other see only desirable qualities. Anne wanted him to take away a picture of her smiling and confident, and she succeeded. When Roger sailed for France it was with the comfortable assurance that he was leaving behind him a wife who would be safe and contented in her sister's home.

But he had scarcely disembarked on the other side before Anne began to get restless. She was begin-

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ning to pay the penalty of her education.— or her lack of it. She had no resources within herself. All over the country there were hundreds, yes, thousands like her, wives of high-salaried young men, who were neither of the overworked laboring class nor of the equally overworked moneyed world. They were born and spent all their days in the temperate zone of human endeavor. They went from a father's providing hand to a husband's protection, and the winds were tempered to them from the cradle to the grave. And all good things they took for granted.

In return for the beneficence of their circumstances they told a competent cook what to have for dinner, watched a competent nursemaid giving the baby a sterilized bath — if there chanced to be a baby; did a bit of darning; telephoned a woman friend or two; reminded the janitor that the steam heat was not behaving as it should; lunched; slept half an hour; made a careful toilet, and then, groomed sleekly, went forth to a *matinée*, or a tea-room, or to have their nails done, or to play bridge, or to listen politely to a Baroness raising money for the Russian

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ambulance, or to a thinly clad person wailing East Indian love songs for Serbian Relief. They got home in time for dinner, smiled brightly at husband, inquired amiably if he had had a good day — going on before he could answer to talk about something else — ; and in the evening took him to the Bridge Club, or to somebody's Little Dancing Club, or to a Symphony Concert, which bored him sadly. In New York Anne was only one of hundreds of these temperate-zone ladies. On any fine afternoon she walked up Fifth Avenue in company with scores of them, cleverly dressed young matrons, alert, bright-eyed, slender as shadows,— almost entirely useless, almost entirely idle.

Of this class was Anne Henderson. She was very pretty, in the bright, rather fragile American way, enormously quick at picking up the latest thing from the smart fashion magazines, clever with the furnishings of her home, energetic by spurts, and quite pleased with herself in a way that was never offensive because she was charming, good humored and delightful to look at.

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But early in the spring of 1917 things were beginning to happen that troubled the serenity even of the Anne Hendersons of the country. Here and there the Rogers were slipping out from under the burden of offices and wives — to take up a burden more glorious, if more terrible. And here and there a wife was finding herself thrown back upon her relatives, bewildered, a trifle resentful in spite of her pride in her man, and finally restless in her changed circumstances.

Anne had not been with sister Emma two months before she was saying to herself that she could not stand it another month. Emma meant well, she was devoted to her younger sister, but Anne had never particularly liked Emma's Henry, and, anyway, living in another woman's home was irksome after being queen of her own. Besides, Emma was rather tactless in her criticism of Roger, her stand being that Roger should have stayed at home and taken care of his wife. And having nothing, now, in the way of household management to occupy her, Anne did more thinking than she had ever done in her life before.

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It was rather hazy thinking, to be sure; but in the course of it she asked herself several unusual questions, as, for instance, what she could do to earn a living, in case she found her position in Emma's household too difficult?

At this early stage of the game there had not begun that rush of women into industry that was to be an astonishing feature of the following year; but even then women were doing many interesting things in war work. Anne would have liked to wear a uniform and drive a motor car, but when she made a few tentative inquiries and found that this picturesque branch involved furnishing not only the uniform but the motor car, she gave up that ideal. Even to go abroad as a canteen worker, at that time, she found she must pay a thousand dollars and speak fluent French. She had neither. Nursing was out of the question. It made her ill to think of scrubbing a hospital floor. But there was the great world of business. To be sure she had never been interested even in her husband's business; but she had met, in

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fiction, several amazing business women; she let her mind play around this field hopefully.

And so, Roger had not been gone long when all these vague stirrings of discontent in Anne's mind were brought to a head one day when she met at a tea a young woman whom she had known at school and had not seen much of since. Marian Beal was now a young widow who had tired of a comfortable but too restricted home with her mother-in-law. She, too, was being troubled by the time-spirit. But she was plainly much more experienced than Anne. She had already come undaunted through one bout with the world, having tried a job as social secretary to a rich but crotchety old lady. As no one could read her writing and she was too indolent to master the typewriter, and being moreover averse to order and discipline of any kind, Marian was a failure even at inditing dinner notes. So now she proposed going into business for herself.

"It's going to be awfully exciting," she confided gayly to Anne. "I'm going to open a shop — I've got the name already: The Shop of Precious

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Things. Isn't that a fetching name? I'm going to have the sign done in mauve and orange to match the curtains in the windows, and of course, I'll get a smart location. I have the darlindest mauve smock I'm going to wear. I think possibly I'll have a maid to open the door and serve tea. The whole thing's going to be too swanky for anything!"

Anne listened enviously; Marian's conservation opened up a magic world of possibilities. It developed that all Marian lacked was a small capital and a partner.

Lying awake that night Anne grew more and more excited as she thought about Marian's idea. Next morning she asked Emma to lend her the money necessary to become Marian's partner. Emma looked aghast and promptly refused.

"Anne Henderson, if you have anything to do with that rattle-brained Beal girl you'll be sorry for it. She's absolutely irresponsible. I've always said she'd be a Becky Sharp if she had more brains! Why, you'd be a baby in her hands! What do you

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know about business? And, besides, what would everybody say?"

"I don't care what everybody would say," Anne retorted stormily. "I'm tired of sitting around waiting for letters from Roger and knitting. I'm so unhappy — I have so much time to think — a dozen times a day I see Roger getting killed over there ——"

"Anne, for goodness' sake don't cry! We've gone all over that a hundred times. You know that Henry says the officers in the trenches aren't in any more danger than they would be in the subway. Henry says that statistics show ——"

"Henry! Yes, it's all right for Henry — he's sticking safe at home with his old statistics. Emma, I don't see how you can let him sleep in his chair every night after dinner — he's getting disgustingly fat around the waist."

And the conversation ended in a marked coldness on both sides. Emma, hurt in her tenderest spot by Anne's remarks about her Henry, declared that she washed her hands of Anne and her affairs. She had

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tried to give Anne a good home and make her contented and Anne had no gratitude. And Anne, stung to the quick by Emma's outspoken disbelief in her practical abilities, was more aroused than she had ever been.

Running up to her room she put on her outdoor things and went to the drug store on the corner, where she could telephone without being overheard. She got Marian Beal on the wire and informed her that their hopes were dead; Emma refused to lend the money.

"How disappointing!" came back Marian's voice. "I should so have loved to have you for a partner, Anne — you would have been so ornamental in a smock. You haven't any other friend who would lend you the money?"

"No one I'd care to ask." Anne's voice was mournful. "Don't you know any one that would let us have the money, just for a little while?"

There was a silence as if Marian was thinking. "Do you know Colonel Hardenbrook, Anne?" she

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asked finally. "No? Well, it doesn't matter. I don't know whether he would ——"

"I don't think we should borrow money from a man, Marian!" Anne interrupted.

Marian laughed. "You're a funny little duck! I didn't say we were going to, did I? Let me see ——" a long pause —— "I tell you what! Suppose we have tea to-morrow at Sherry's? We'll talk it all over then. And, look here —— wear that spiffy little brown suit you had on the other day, will you, darling?"

When Anne walked into Sherry's the next afternoon she wore the requested garments and the little fur-trimmed hat that went with them. Moreover, as she had walked across the Park and down the Avenue she had a lovely color. Her lips were parted eagerly as she glanced about for her friend, and her eyes were very bright. Marian rose from a deep velvet sofa and swam to meet her.

"Darling, you look perfectly swanky! I love that hat and veil. And, Anne, this is Colonel Hardenbrook. He came this afternoon for just one reason —— to meet you."

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Anne's eyes grew large with surprise as she became aware that there was a gentleman with Marian. He bent smiling over her hand.

"I came for *two* reasons," he said, glancing gallantly from Anne to Marian. But his eyes came back at once to rest approvingly on that bit of Anne's cheek where in her veil a tiny leaf was outlined in velvet dots against the delicious pink of her cheek.

After they were seated at a table overlooking the Avenue the Colonel continued to look at Anne's rosy color as an epicure gazes at a particularly delectable dessert. In fact, he gazed at both of his companions as if they were two piquant appetizers served up for before-dinner consumption. He leaned back in his chair with his hands negligently in the pockets of his extremely well tailored, slightly sporty clothes, his shrunken figure collapsing inside their smart lines as if he had no backbone whatever. But his eyes were never still. They were set so far back under two ragged, grizzled brows that it was impossible to tell what was their color, but the gleam of them was not hidden. It was like a little searchlight, pursuing

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every human object within range with its speculative gleam. It ranged from Marian to Anne as if he were counting their very eyelashes and searching with mildly cynical amusement their hidden thoughts.

He could not, if he had searched ten blocks of the Avenue that afternoon, have found two women more dissimilar. Perhaps this was what kept him glancing with that appraising gleam from one to the other. Marian Beal was long-limbed, graceful and excessively thin, with a pale olive skin which only the most rigorous attention to diet kept from being sallow. Her eyes were a mixture of olive and green, and they had the gift of a hundred shades of expression from a watchful blankness to a sparkling diablerie. She was extremely clever with clothes. With the aid of a black gown, a bizarre string of beads and a hat at a daring angle she could turn her plainness to a provocative piquancy.

By contrast Anne looked very young. There was something innocent, candid and fresh about her as she sat drinking her tea, with her brown hair curling up under the fur of her hat and the veil with the

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velvet leaf thrown back over her shoulder. She rather resented the Colonel's detached, amused attitude, but she innocently enjoyed his unconcealed admiration. He seemed to her so old that there could be no offense in his glances. He must be, she reflected, glancing at his shriveled hands, at least fifty, perhaps sixty — which age seemed very ancient indeed to her.

She wondered whether he and Marian had met without premeditation at the door, or if Marian had invited him, and if so, why — he was so totally different from the type of man she had always known. But she was very quickly to know why he was there, for Marian lost no time in getting to the point. As she poured the tea she launched into a vivacious description of her new enterprise. As she elaborated her idea it sounded rich, promising and picturesque. Anne lost her shyness of the Colonel and joined in. The Colonel leaned back in his chair, looking from one to the other while his eyes appeared to retreat into their shaggy lairs, from which they sent out gleams of curiosity and amusement.

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"Isn't it going to be too awfully swanky for anything?" cried Marian, with her most ingenuous air. "If you are very nice, you may come every afternoon and have tea with us."

"Corking! I can't think of anything I'd rather do. You'll be irresistible in those mauve smocks — especially our little friend, here." He looked at Anne. Then he immediately turned his gleam back upon Marian, but with a difference. "Where are you going to get your capital?" he inquired.

Marian met the Colonel's eye direct, with an audacious sparkle. "That is where you come in, Colonel dear!" she laughed.

The Colonel laughed also, but warily. "So I suspected," he murmured.

Anne felt the blood rushing up to her face. So this was why Marian had arranged this little tea-party! It seemed to her rather awful, the baldness of inviting a man to tea and then holding him up for a loan. For a moment she wished she were anywhere but at that table; she felt like apologizing for herself and Marian, and she looked down into her tea-

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cup with distressed eyes. But in a moment she decided she was taking the thing too seriously. For the Colonel and Marian were treating the proposition as if it were a good joke; for several minutes they thrust and parried like two duelists who understood each other thoroughly. As far as Anne could make out they did not get anywhere; but when the Colonel abruptly arose, declared that he must be off, shook hands and walked out with his stiffly jaunty step, Marian poured herself another cup of tea, gave a let-down sigh and said:

“He'll lend us the money, all right.”

Anne's eyes opened wide. “He didn't say he would!”

“The Colonel never commits himself. But in two or three days he'll come across. What's the matter, darling? You look unhappy.”

“I — I don't exactly like it. I wish we could have borrowed the money from some one we — we know better.”

“Oh, I know the Colonel well enough,” declared Marian, carelessly. “I saw a great deal of him when



"THAT IS WHERE YOU COME IN, COLONEL DEAR," SHE LAUGHED



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I was Mrs. Bragdon's secretary. He's a good old sort, though I don't think he's a Colonel, really. I fancy the head-waiters gave him the title. But he belongs to one of the oldest families in New York; he's in the right things much more than you and I will ever be. Oh, yes, he's really all right, if you know how to handle him."

"But I don't like borrowing money from a man," said Anne uneasily. "I've never had to do anything of the kind, and I don't believe I want to begin."

"You'll never succeed in business if you're too fussy," said Marian calmly. She looked at herself in the mirror of her vanity case. "I shouldn't have eaten those almond cakes. All you have to do, child, is to look as pretty as you do this afternoon and be a little bit nice to the Colonel, and I'll manage the rest. And, by the way, I've got another perfectly ducky idea: over the shop I have in mind there's a little apartment. It will be vacant next month. Suppose we take it and set up housekeeping there? We could have a cunning little maid, and the whole thing would be perfectly spiffing, I think. You could

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take some of your furniture out of storage — there's quite a decent living-room, with an old-fashioned fireplace. Can't you see it — chintz, and your colonial mahogany, one of those stunning new bird-cages of wicker, flowers, a maid in a cap and Swiss apron — heavens! wouldn't it be good to be independent of our relatives, Anne? ”

Anne gasped that she'd have to talk it over with Emma.

“Anne Henderson,” cried Marian impressively, “you'll never get anywhere until you learn not to talk it over with Emma. You must learn to express your own self. That's what you lack, Anne — self-expression.”

“I believe I do,” said Anne thoughtfully. “I can see that I've always been treated like a child. I'd like to prove to Emma and Roger that I'm able to take care of myself, perhaps, even to make a big success. I'm not saying one thing against Emma, but I am tired of being handed about and dictated to. I should like to be free and a success, and I don't believe I ever can be as long as I live with Emma.”

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“Never, darling!” agreed Marian, fastening her veil. “We’ll run over and look at that apartment now. We’ll take a taxi, if you have any money.”

CHAPTER III

IT required another tea and a luncheon with the Colonel before Marian and Anne really saw, as Marian put it, the color of his money. But when he did hand them over his cheque, he did it so off-handedly, so genially, as to make Anne forget her distaste for the whole transaction. In the meantime, Marian (apparently she had no uncertainty, or else she was blithely reckless) had leased the shop of her desire and the little apartment over it. The day the Colonel gave them the cheque Anne told Emma what she was going to do.

Emma received the news with alarm and indignation. She used her sisterly right to tell Anne the truth about her practical abilities so freely that Anne felt more than ever that she was doing right in leaving Emma's roof. There was one detail about which she was not quite frank with Emma; she let her sister believe that Marian alone was finding the capital.

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"There is one consolation," said Emma, when she had exhausted her arguments against the move, "you're not putting anything except your time into the thing, and when you've come an awful cropper with that Beal girl you can come back here. You know, Anne, my home will always be yours."

Anne tried to be nice and grateful, but inwardly Emma's assumption that she would be a failure made her seethe. She vowed to herself that if by any absurd chance she should fail, she would not come running back to Emma. Also she determined not to tell Roger what she was doing until her success was assured. Emma grudgingly agreed not to give her away. It was arranged that Anne's mail should be forwarded to her new address.

Anne had as much of her furniture taken out of storage as the little apartment over the shop called for, she removed all of her personal belongings from under Emma's roof; and when she herself departed therefrom in a taxicab, it was with the sensation of a Columbus who has at last acquired his ship and

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heads it toward a new world. She had never felt so exhilarated as she did that morning.

She and Marian then put in two or three busy and exciting weeks arranging the apartment and the shop. Marian left the domestic arrangements to Anne, but she herself did the buying of the Precious Things which were to make up their stock. To be sure, she had almost no knowledge of ceramics, fabrics, curios and period furniture. But she possessed plenty of self-confidence. Moreover she was really clever with colors, draperies and the arrangement of things so as to form an attractive interior. And she knew how to work her friends to the uttermost. In borrowed motor cars she cruised up and down the Boston Post road, acquiring here and there bits of furniture, pottery, copper and silver. Some of it was good, but most of it was ugly. However, all antiques looked alike to Marian. In the shops she visited she picked up a smattering of the jargon of the trade.

"Yes, this piece is really rather precious," she learned to say, contemplating dreamily with her head on one side, a Hepplewhite chair. "One of a set

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from the Pendleton collection. You will find it in Lockwood's book. Had a tremendously hard time getting it. But it was worth all my trouble. Hephlewhite's own mark underneath the upholstery."

Then she would retreat a step and regard the chair through half-closed eyes. "The true shield-back," she would murmur. "Happy composition — very, very happy!"

The Colonel, who dropped in at the shop often while they were furnishing it, seemed to find this very amusing. He would chuckle and glance at Anne, who always felt a bit bewildered and uneasy when Marian and the Colonel had a joke between them.

"When you are selling this piece," he would say, pointing with his stick at a high-boy that had just come in from Fourth Avenue, "you must put your finger here —" He took Anne's hand and placed her fingers upon a bit of carving.

"Why?" she asked innocently.

"Because then you won't be lying when you say it has been in an old Salem family for over a hundred years."

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"But it has — hasn't it? Marian told Mrs. Huntley-Sprague this morning that it came from Salem."

Marian laughed immoderately and the Colonel pulled at his grizzled mustache with the dry sound that passed for mirth.

"That top drawer is genuine." The Colonel touched with his stick the beautifully carved shell ornament at the top of the high-boy. "It's the only old bit about the piece. That's why you must always touch it when you don't want to tell a lie."

"But the worm-holes, the old look!"

"Permanganate of potash and ammonia!" The Colonel chuckled.

Anne looked as she felt — astonished. Her expression sent Marian off into another gale of laughter; the Colonel patted her cheek.

Of course, she had always known there was such a thing as faking an antique, but she had never thought of herself as being a party to this sort of shabby fraud. But she was going through too exciting and absorbing a period to give much thought

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to the ethics of her new business venture. Besides, Marian had a way of looking at her with a mixture of amusement and contempt whenever she ventured to question her proceedings that made Anne feel small and unimportant. She was, just now, under the spell of Marian's cleverness, her audacity and superior knowledge of the world. She said to herself that if Marian did and said some things that were not quite "nice," why, one must expect not to be too finicky if one were to succeed in a competitive world. On one point only did she take a firm stand; that they must not borrow any more money from the Colonel. This is what Marian wanted to do when she saw the end of the Colonel's cheque in sight. The shop was really too bare, she held; she had seen a ducky pair of Korean portières that would be perfectly wonderful draped against the back wall. Why not strike the Colonel for a second loan, and do the thing up right?

"No," said Anne firmly, somewhat to her partner's surprise, "I don't think we ought to owe anybody

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any more money. Especially the Colonel," she added.

"Poor old Colonel! Don't you like him?" Marian inquired, carelessly.

"Not very well," Anne admitted truthfully. "He says he's old enough to be my father, but I wish he wouldn't stroke my cheek."

"Oh, well, don't mind him! And, for goodness' sake, don't show that you resent it — not until we get things to running well, anyway. He has no end of friends with money. He'll send them to us, if you don't offend him. You have such a small-town attitude toward some things, Anne."

"Perhaps I have!" Anne admitted meekly. "But we mustn't borrow any more money, Marian."

"All right; but that means I'll have to get the rest of my stuff on Fourth Avenue. It doesn't matter, much, anyway. No one ever carries more than one or two genuine pieces. I've found an old Swiss chap who can imitate anything in the world. Get Cleopatra to wash that old blue and you arrange it in the new cabinet, will you, there's a dear? I've

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a dinner engagement. If the Colonel comes in, just be nice to him, won't you, darling? "

Cleopatra was the colored maid they had already engaged to run the little apartment over the shop. It was Marian's plan to have Cleopatra serve tea in the shop on certain afternoons. She had designed a costume for her — after Bakst! Cleopatra, with her Oriental cheek-bones and her languid movements, was wonderfully in the picture. At other times she wore a black dress and white apron and served the two girls their rather sketchy meals.

At last the opening day of the Shop of Precious Things was announced. The sign in mauve and orange was hung over the door; the orange curtains were draped over the windows, parted just enough to reveal one or two of the few genuine objects Marian had acquired, but not wide enough to spoil the mystery beyond. And a great many cards were sent out to Anne's friends, to Marian's and to a few of the Colonel's.

The response was generous. So many persons came that no one could see the Precious Things nor

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hear what Marian said about them for clatter of tongues and tea-things. But the afternoon was considered a great success. To be sure no one bought anything, and the guests consumed gallons of tea and ate or trod into the rugs pounds of little cakes. They stood about and gossiped of everything but Precious Things; but it was understood they would come back later with their cheque books. Anne's best friend, Ada Kent, came with Emma. They looked a trifle askance at the wondrous orange smock Anne wore, but they admitted that the Shop was really distinguished. And after all, they said to each other, it was not as if it was really Greenwich village Bohemianism; there was Colonel Hardenbrook, and there were his friends! Perhaps — who could tell! Anne might really be going to make a success of this thing.

And Anne was tremendously excited and happy. She felt that it was one of the most triumphant afternoons of her life. She felt very modern — was she not now in a way to understand what was meant by the economic independence of women? She wished

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that Roger were there to see her in her new setting; if he were he might change his opinion of her efficiency. It seemed to her that she stood on the threshold of a business success, a success that would be picturesque and that would not entail too arduous an effort. Moreover, it would not interfere with an occasional social diversion. She did not believe she would care to go in for business to the exclusion of everything else. She meant to keep up as far as possible with Ada Kent and the other wives she knew whose prosperous husbands maintained them in a state of almost complete idleness.

After the guests and prospective patrons had gone that afternoon the Colonel lingered, helping Anne to collect teacups. Marian, declaring she was exhausted, lay prone on an Empire sofa, smiling her mysterious smile and looking very striking in a mauve smock embroidered in orange, with her black hair banded low on her forehead and a pair of jade earrings dangling from her ears. But when the Colonel offered to take them out to dinner she accepted with alacrity. She said she did not want to see the shop

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again until Cleopatra had swept up the crumbs and cigarette ash. Anne, after an instant's hesitation, accepted also. The two girls ran upstairs, put on their prettiest dinner gowns and came down in a gale of gayety. They drove across town to the Colonel's favorite Broadway restaurant.

"But to-night's a special night," Anne said to herself, to still the uneasy reflection that neither Emma nor Roger would approve of the Colonel or his dinners. "In business one can't be too fussy!"

She and Marian had agreed that they would take turns letting each other off for social engagements. But the shop had not been open a fortnight before Anne discovered that Marian's interpretation of this agreement was very liberal—in her own favor. Marian dined out a great deal, which meant she must rest before dressing, and so Anne gave up one or two bridge teas she wanted very much to go to. Also Marian made many mysterious flights which she called "running down a customer." Anne could not remonstrate, because Marian really did bring in several persons, who now and then bought something.

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Most of them appeared to be from out of town, from the west, Anne surmised. She wondered where Marian picked up her variegated acquaintances, but when she asked her Marian only laughed. Anne suspected that she met many of them in hotel lobbies. And one day Marian appeared with a large, overdressed woman in tow, who divulged the fact to Anne that she had become acquainted with Marian only two days before in a dressing room of the Waldorf.

"It's the luckiest thing in the world for me that I met up with her," Mrs. Wesley Hunter confided to Anne, while Marian had run upstairs for a moment — Mrs. Wes, they all called her in her home town, she said. "I've been kicking around the hotel for three weeks, as lonesome as a houn'-dog, not knowing just how or where to break in. Mr. Hunter, he said to me when we come east: 'You're going to take it easy for the rest o' your days. Just cut loose, now, and spend money,' he says. But that's easy enough to say. I'm not such a fool I can't see that a body can spend money all wrong in this town. What I want to know is how to spend it right!"

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Anne was amused, and yet something in the expression of Mrs. Hunter's honest, sunburned face touched her. She looked hungry for help in a world that was rather like a Midas feast to her. She had the golden touch, but the things she bought did not feed her. Some inherent, shrewd taste there was in her that told her when she was going wrong; but she did not have the training or background to guide her right. In this state of mind she had fallen into Marian's clever hands. Anne did not need a hint from Marian to reconstruct the whole situation: Mr. Hunter growing suddenly rich out of the war, bringing his wife to New York, establishing her in the hotel they had always wanted to see, and then leaving her alone most of the day while he was about his business. Mrs. Hunter prowling wistfully through the shops, buying a quantity of the wrong kind of clothes in the first plunge, discarding them for others only a degree better, growing self-distrustful, giving up the shops for the corridor of the hotel, where she sat all day trying, as she said, to get a line

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on the right way to spend those bills Mr. Hunter crammed into her hands.

Marian gave her tea, after pulling the orange curtains and lighting the candles cozily. Mrs. Hunter's homesick soul expanded.

"Mr. Hunter wants to live in New York winters and go back home summers," she told Anne. "We've sold the ranch, anyway, so I suppose we might as well. But I told him we've got to get some place where I can go out into the kitchen and cook us up a meal if I want to."

"To be sure!" Marian interrupted. "What you want, dear Mrs. Hunter, is to make the right kind of a background for yourself and Mr. Hunter, so that you will be ready to enter into the social life of New York. But you must get the background first, of course. Once you have that the rest will be simple. In New York one's setting has everything to do with one's social success or failure, if you get me, dear Mrs. Hunter!"

Anne listened with amusement and some astonishment to Marian pouring into Mrs. Hunter's eager

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ear the right gospel of social success in New York. According to Marian it was all a matter of background, which should be unique and yet dignified, in short the sort of background she, Marian, could help Mrs. Hunter to acquire.

"I guess Mr. Hunter and I've been too busy to think very much about what sort of things we've had around us," said Mrs. Hunter, her eye roving wistfully around the shop. "But there's no reason, now, why we shouldn't wade in and have a real fashionable home. But it's hard to know just how to begin. A hotel ain't homey, and you can't make it so, I tell Mr. Hunter."

"No, indeed!" asserted Marian, passing Mrs. Hunter the toast. "You must take an apartment — let me see! — possibly on Park Avenue. Then, as you'll be furnishing it from the beginning — you'll want to do that of course, dear Mrs. Hunter, or you'll *never* get any atmosphere! — you can strike absolutely a *note*, if you get what I mean. And in New York everything depends on the note. Strike your note and the rest is easy!"

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Mrs. Hunter gazed at Marian with a kindling faith in her honest eyes, while Marian, leaning back, half closed her eyes and seemed to be contemplating the magic note that was to smooth the social path for Mrs. Hunter. Suddenly she sprang up with one of her lithe movements and darted upon a curio cabinet in a distant corner. It was a singularly ugly cabinet, acquired in one of Marian's first unenlightened plunges. It was so undesirable, in fact, that the Colonel had advised them to keep it in the darkest corner.

"Chinese Chippendale!" cried Marian, with a dramatic gesture towards the cabinet. "*Your note!*"

Mrs. Hunter made an uncertain sound. It was plain that she was beyond her depth.

"We'll make your drawing-room Chinese Chippendale! It's tremendously the vogue now. Of course, it's also rather hard to get, but fortunately we have this really beautiful piece to start with. Then there is this settee—" Marian moved across the room and ecstatically paused before a sofa the

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like of which could not have been found anywhere in Chippendale's own book.

"This is really a precious bit. It came from the Thomas B. Sykes collection, but really, you know, in its essential spirit it is wedded to my cherished cabinet there, don't you think so, Anne?"

She turned to her ominously silent partner.

"I think they are both ugly!" said Anne, bluntly. She was somewhat surprised at herself, but the words had leaped out. However, Marian covered the awkward moment with her most silvery laugh.

"She doesn't feel in harmony with Chinese Chippendale," she explained. "One must be just a bit exotic — but that's why it is so perfectly *our* note, Mrs. Hunter. Your drawing-room will be striking, and yet orthodox, too. Take, for instance, the cabinet against this drapery ——"

She snatched down a yard or two of batik and held it up alongside the cabinet, smiling at Mrs. Hunter. And Mrs. Hunter, full of tea and toast, and mysteriously excited by the new phrases, colors and objects she was being showered with, smiled back

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uncertainly. Anne found herself quite unable to contemplate Mrs. Hunter and Marian any longer. She murmured an excuse and went upstairs.

When Marian joined her she was full of triumph: she had sold Mrs. Hunter two hundred dollars' worth of Chinese Chippendale, as well as several pieces of pottery to go in the curio cabinet. She was to have the furnishing of the drawing-room in the new apartment, as well as the dining room and Mrs. Hunter's bedroom.

"Isn't she delicious!" she laughed. "I didn't know there was any one so naïve left in the world. And the hotel lobbies are full of dozens like her just now. I believe I'll open a How-to-spend Bureau for the newly rich!"

"That would be all right if you were to show them how to buy really good things. But that cabinet, Marian! You know it's atrocious. We never hoped to get twenty-five dollars for it, and you sold it to her for a hundred and fifty."

Anne's voice was indignant, and the smile on Marian's face gave way to an expression of annoyance.

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“I think your attitude is silly, Anne! We’re in this for all we can get out of it — which has been precious little up to now. We can’t afford to be high-minded, my dear! And, anyway, look at it sensibly — if we don’t take that indecently rich person and use her, some one else will! She’s bound to have a lot of bad stuff unloaded on to her sooner or later — and I can do it so artistically, you see!”

She laughed again, her high good nature returning. Anne regarded her partner with scorn in her eyes, but with a growing sense of helplessness in her heart. After all, Marian was right. Some one would pluck poor Mrs. Hunter, and Marian would do it painlessly. She had a cleverness that would make of Mrs. Hunter’s new home something much better than Mrs. Hunter could ever achieve with the aid of the shops she would inevitably drift to. There would be some worthless pieces of furniture and bric-a-brac in it — Marian was already figuring how much of their undesirable stock she could unload — but the whole result would be infinitely beyond what Mrs. Hunter had ever had. If she should advise Mrs. Hunter

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against buying their pseudo Chinese Chippendale and their rapidly going out of style painted furniture, she would anger Marian and only bewilder Mrs. Hunter.

She sighed, feeling for the first time a sense of depression as she contemplated the future of the shop. Business was not so simple a process as she had taken it to be. And also, she was beginning to be a bit weary of the shop.

She grew more weary of it during the next month. Marian more and more left the charge of the shop to her, having now the excuse that the Hunter apartment required her attention. She spent most of her afternoons shopping with Mrs. Hunter, for it appeared that she had not only taken over the Hunter menage, but she was reforming Mrs. Hunter sartorially. She confided gayly to Anne that she was making quite goodly sums from the commissions that certain dressmakers, furriers and hatters gave her. It did not seem to occur to her that she was adding to her income at the expense of the Shop. Having

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sold Mrs. Hunter all she dared from the Shop, she acted as if she were losing interest in it.

And Anne, never having in all her life been tied to a fixed routine, came to hate the Shop, to feel a dreadful ennui as she sat in it waiting for customers.

For, it must be admitted, there were very few of these. Of all the persons who had drunk their tea and consumed their cakes, not a dozen had ever come back to buy. And alarmingly few were the strangers who exhibited an interest in Precious Things. Now and then one of Anne's friends dropped in to chat with her, but gradually they came less often. Even Ada Kent, who had been Anne's most constant companion, came only once or twice after the initial tea drinking. She had a thousand things to do, she said, shopping, the theaters and so on, and it was very inconvenient having a friend who could not go everywhere with her at a moment's notice.

On the afternoons when Anne wanted to go to a tea or to Ada Kent's bridge club, Marian was sure to be out. So Anne sometimes left Cleopatra in the Shop and went, whether or no. And Cleopatra, not

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having a soul for Precious Things, would turn the key in the lock and go out on affairs of her own. Sometimes on these afternoons, what might have been a customer came, tried the door, looked surprised and went away, never to return. Marian never got up before ten in the morning, and Anne fell into the way of sleeping late herself. More and more they left the morning tidying up of the Shop to Cleopatra.

So the dust gathered on the Precious Things, the orange curtains faded in streaks, the mahogany grew a gray film, objects sold were not replaced. And in the pigeon holes of the desk behind the screen in the corner bills and urgent notes began to collect. The Shop began to wear a bleak, disconsolate look.

Anne tried not to let herself think that the Shop was not flourishing, and her one great dread was that Emma would find it out. She knew Emma would cry "I told you so!"—an exclamation her sensitive vanity shrank from hearing.

She was therefore rather relieved one day when Emma came in in flustered haste, to say that the Doctor had ordered Henry to a dry climate for the

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spring. Henry had developed a cough that worried her greatly. They were leaving immediately, before Henry grew worse.

As Emma closed the door behind her, Anne felt a queer sinking of her heart. Emma had invited her to go with them, but the invitation had been rather perfunctory. Anne and Henry had never been congenial. Anne would not have accepted the invitation, anyway, but as Emma vanished Anne was aware that she was being left much to her own resources for the first time in her life. The thought rather frightened her. But she propped up her sinking spirits with the reflection that there was Marian. With all Marian's cleverness they would sooner or later make a go of the Shop — they must!

Emma had not been gone a week when Anne received the greatest shock she had ever had, except for the night when Roger had told her he was going to enlist. Afterward she always winced when she thought of that afternoon and evening. For several days Marian had appeared unusually restless, flitting in and out constantly. Then, one morning, after

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having received a telephone call, she came down to the Shop where Anne was listlessly dusting.

"Anne, I'm going to leave you," she began without preliminaries. "Mrs. Hunter is going to Florida and Bermuda, and she has invited me to go along. I'd be a fool not to take the opportunity. We're leaving to-night."

"To-night! But, Marian, how long will you be gone?"

"How can I tell? As long as it amuses me, probably. Five or six months, perhaps."

Anne stood with a pewter teapot in one hand and the dustcloth in the other, her eyes frozen to Marian's face.

"Six months! But what about the Shop?"

"Oh, the Shop!" Marian stretched her arms above her head with a gesture of relief. "I shall be so glad to get away from it. The whole thing bores me so! But you can run it alone, nicely, Anne, with Cleo to help you."

Anne set down the pewter teapot, with a consciousness that something queer and sickening was happen-

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ing to her heart. "Marian, there's one thing you seem to have forgotten!" she cried. "What about the Colonel — the money we owe him? We haven't paid back a penny of it yet, you know!"

Marian, who was halfway to the door, laughed impatiently. "Dear child, don't worry about the Colonel. He's worth about a million. Do you think he's going to fuss about a dinky loan like that? Besides, we've amused him, no end! I really must hurry ——"

"But, Marian, I don't know anything about how we stand. You've done the buying — all those bills in the desk — what shall I ——"

Marian opened the door. "I can't stop now, Anne, with all my packing to do. But I'll write you about the accounts, or maybe there'll be time before I go. I must fly!"

And she was gone, calling to Cleo to have her trunks brought up from the storeroom.

All that afternoon Anne sat in the Shop, listening to the sound of Marian and Cleopatra packing in the rooms above. The maid called her to luncheon,

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and finally brought her down a tray of food, which she could scarcely touch. The rest of the afternoon she sat perfectly still, or she walked about the Shop picking up one object after another without seeing it. Once she went to the desk behind the screen and began frantically looking over the drifted bills, but they only added to the dismay that was engulfing her, and she thrust them back. Many of them had never been opened. She had received a shock that made it difficult to think or act coherently; her thoughts scuttled here and there like frightened mice.

She knew she ought to go upstairs and arrive at some sort of an understanding with Marian, but she felt utterly helpless before the thought of this encounter. She knew, now, that Marian's hard, glazed surface was quite impenetrable. Also, the probabilities were that Marian knew as little as she herself about their finances.

But as the Shop grew dark, she finally pulled herself together and, locking the shop door, started upstairs. She was half way up them when the door of

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the apartment opened, and Marian, hatted and furred and looking very brilliant behind her veil, came running down. She swept Anne into an embrace that drowned her cry of dismay.

“I’m off, old darling! Mrs. Hunter telephoned that I was to have dinner with them and go to the train from there. A man will be up for my luggage and trunk in an hour. It’s a shame to leave you in such a whirl, dear, but it can’t be helped. You’ll find my address on my dressing table. Write me all about everything — and I’ll write as soon as I arrive — good-by, Anne, dear — sorry, awfully — good-by!”

She was gone before Anne could get out a word. She had banged the outer door behind her while Anne was still gasping. Anne saw through that dinner engagement; Marian had not wanted to have a final talk.

She went on upstairs and tried to eat the dinner Cleo had arranged on the table in front of the fire in the living room, but there seemed to be an iron band about her throat. She was left alone with a

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Shop on her hands, and a desk full of unpaid bills. And Roger was in France and Emma in Arizona.

The maid took the dinner things away. A little later she said good-night, and Anne heard her close the outer door. She had gone home for the night.

Anne still sat staring into the fire when the door-bell rang. She went into the little foyer of the apartment and opened the door. The Colonel stood on the threshold smiling.

He came in briskly with his stiffly jaunty step, disposed of his coat and stick, and walked toward the fire. Anne took a long time in closing the door. The Colonel was the last person in the world she wanted to see; she knew she was utterly unprepared for this moment and what it might bring forth.

"Marian out?" asked the Colonel.

Anne's first instinct was to lie, to say that Marian had retired with a headache, but she was still hesitating when the Colonel looked at her sharply from under his brows and said:

"So, she's gone, has she?"

"Yes! How did you know?"

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“Oh, I’ve been expecting her to bolt for some weeks.”

“Ah! Why didn’t you tell me?”

The Colonel lifted his eyebrows. “Tell you! My dear child, I thought you knew Marian Beal as well as I do. She’s as irresponsible as the wind. I wouldn’t trust her across the street!”

“But you —” Then Anne stopped abruptly. It had been on the tip of her tongue to cry: “But you lent her money!” She stopped because of the peculiar smile the Colonel bent upon her.

“My dear little girl,” he said, as if he uncannily read her thought, “I made that loan to you — not to Marian.”

CHAPTER IV

FOR half a moment the room was very still. Anne stood clutching the back of a chair, her head hanging. After observing her shrewdly for a few seconds the Colonel walked across the room, took her hand and led her toward the sofa in front of the fire, where he placed a cushion behind her and then seated himself in the opposite corner.

“Now, tell me all about it.” His voice was soothing and matter of fact. “You’ve got your finances all tangled up and don’t know what to do about it — eh? Well, just remember this, little friend —” he leaned a bit nearer to pat her hand — “there’s no financial difficulty that can’t be straightened out, if you go about it right.”

Anne laughed nervously. “I’m afraid I don’t know how to go about it right. All afternoon I’ve been thinking and thinking, and I’m so frightened.

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I left the bills to Marian, and I don't believe she's paid a third of them."

"Didn't keep any books, did you?"

"No, Marian said it wasn't necessary, and I tried — a little — but I didn't know how. Things got mixed up, somehow."

"No partnership papers signed?"

"Goodness, no! We just agreed to be partners, that's all."

The Colonel chuckled softly. "You're a great little mouse. But, never you mind — we'll come out all right. First thing is to sell off that stuff downstairs and sublet the shop. But you would better keep on in this apartment. It's mighty convenient — and, by the way, get rid of Cleopatra. I'll send you a maid — cheaper — friend of mine recommends her."

"I can't keep this apartment, or any sort of maid, even a cheap one," Anne interrupted. "I haven't been over the bills Marian left, yet, but I'm afraid I'm snowed under completely. I ought to have had it out with Marian before she left, but I was so miser-

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ably upset, and she went away hours before I expected her to."

The Colonel chuckled. "She would! She was always too clever for you, my dear!"

Anne was so wrapt in her unhappiness that she had not the spirit to resent even this. She went on, half thinking aloud: "If I give up the Shop, and I'm afraid I shall have to, I'll have to take a cheaper apartment, I suppose . . . or go to Emma in Arizona — only I hate telling Emma. I haven't even told Roger. Oh, dear!"

She leaned back with a weary sigh. The Colonel smiling benevolently, but watching cautiously every shade of expression in her face, said nothing for a moment. Then he leaned toward her and patted her hand.

"Foolish little girl!" he murmured. "Why worry your head about all this? Why not let the old Colonel help you?"

Afterward, going back over the events of this evening, Anne knew that the point at which she began to understand what the Colonel meant was the

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instant when he slowly drew his hand across hers and asked if she wasn't going to let the old Colonel help her. He looked at her sidewise, showing the points of his yellowing teeth under his grizzled mustache in a smile totally different from any she had ever seen on his face. It was a smile at once sly and conciliating, but it was full of meaning. She watched it in fascinated silence.

The Colonel's attitude toward her had always been a mixture of gallantry and fatherliness. If sometimes she had shrunk when he overdid the fatherly character, she thought it was because of the distaste that the very young have for senility. She had accepted Marian's appraisal of the Colonel — that he was a good old sort! — although she had never quite liked him. She had been affable to him, because she had taken Marian's point of view — the Colonel was a sort of godfather to the Shop! She had always considered him rather handsome. But now, as she looked at him, he struck her as looking incredibly mean and old. He wore a gardenia in his buttonhole. She got the cloying scent of it,

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mingled with the odor of Russian tobacco and scented toilet soap that always hung about him. She set her teeth. Turning her eyes away she gazed down at her hands clasped tightly in her lap.

She knew, as well as if she had been through this sort of thing before, what the Colonel was trying to convey to her in his veiled phrases. Nothing in her own life, nor in the lives of any one she knew prepared her; but some instinct deep in her sent up a warning signal to her brain. Every nerve in her body seemed to leap awake, to stand stretched and waiting, while a pulse began to beat in her throat smotheringly.

But she sat still, listening in a frozen silence. And her one dominating sensation was not of fear but of a tremendous astonishment. It was incredible to think that a thing like this could happen to her, Anne Henderson, rightful heir to the pleasant, safe ways of life. Such things, she had always said, happened to women who were weak, or wicked, but not to her, or to any of her friends. And, if by any mischance

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they did happen, a woman of her class would deal with them royally, like an outraged queen.

But she was doing nothing royal whatever. She was merely sitting still, staring at her hands, while the Colonel went on dealing out veiled phrases, tentatively, always ready to withdraw them at the least sign of restiveness on her part. The burden of his conversation was to the effect that she was in a frightful hole, that everything was going to be exceedingly unpleasant for her unless she was sensible about it; that he was a lonely old man with a nature too fine to be contented with the companionship generally offered him; that she was a flower far too delicate and subtle to go unshielded long; that all he asked was the happiness of helping a fine little woman out of a situation that — he repeated it — was going to be confoundedly unpleasant for her.

He mumbled these phrases over and over, feeling his way, while Anne sat rigidly still, seeing again that sheaf of bills in the desk down stairs. Then the Colonel made a mistake which proved that he had not yet learned all the letters in the feminine alphabet.

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He leaned nearer and took her hand in his two yellow, over-manicured ones:

“Poor little mouse!” he said with playful tenderness, “it needs some one to take care of it — that’s the idea — some one to take care of it!”

A nausea of repulsion swept over Anne, followed instantly by a lightning-swift rage. She sprang to her feet, shaking off his hand.

“That’s the trouble with me — I’ve been too much taken care of. And don’t you ever call me a mouse again! I may be a fool, but I’m not a mouse!”

Then to her dismay she leaned her head against the mantelpiece and began to sob nervously. The Colonel stared, blinking. It was plain that he did not quite know what it would be safe for him to do next. But after a second or two he rose and cautiously patted her shoulder.

At the touch of his hand she stiffened and shrank; her sobs ceased instantly. She gave him a long look, with eyes that were very wide and dilated a little. Then she walked to the door, set it open and said in a voice that shook only a trifle:

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"Do you mind going, now — please? I am — I am very tired."

The Colonel, taken aback, rather surprised at her sudden firmness, stared at her. "But we haven't gone over your affairs yet! Don't you think we'd better ——"

She shook her head, and as she did so she tried to smile, for she was thinking: "I mustn't offend him. — I owe him money — how awful!"

"I am really too tired," she stammered.

The Colonel after a shrewd stare at her, assumed an impersonal kindness. "Quite right! We won't bother about things to-night. You get a good sleep, and to-morrow we'll go into everything. Suppose you have dinner with me to-morrow night — eh?"

"Not to-morrow — I shall be — be awfully busy. In two or three days I'll telephone you. I must — must really get things straightened out, first."

With this he was obliged to leave. She closed the door after him and stood listening to the sound of his footsteps receding. Then she turned the key in the lock with hands that shook as if she were hav-

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ing a chill. Wringing them together she stood in the middle of the quiet room and her thoughts cried: "What shall I do! What shall I *do!*"

She ran to the sofa, threw herself down and wept as she had never in all her life wept before. For she was not only frightened, she was humiliated. Her self-esteem was shaken to its foundation. She told herself that she had allowed herself to be made use of by Marian in a way a blind kitten wouldn't have stood for! Her vanity smarted under the reflection.

And she had walked with her eyes open into an equivocal position which moment by moment was opening up to her various frightening possibilities. She raged at herself, crying and digging her fists into the pillow, writhing under a sense of fright and shame such as she had never believed she could feel.

But after awhile she stopped weeping and began genuinely to think. And her thoughts were nothing like any thoughts she had ever had. She sat up to stare into the fire, and she saw not the fading embers but herself — not the self that she had always so

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complacently accepted, but a futile, cowardly and lazy self. One bit of naked truth emerged and struck her between the eyes: she had known from the very first that Marian Beal was not her kind, and she had known that they ought not to accept the Colonel's loan. But she had shut her ears to these inner voices because she wanted to get away from Emma, because of a mere restlessness that demanded change and excitement. And now she was going to have to pay!

She sprang up to open the window, because it seemed to her that the scent of gardenia and Russian tobacco still hung in the air, and she remained at the window staring out at the dark buildings across the street. The city seemed closing in on her —, not the city she had always known, full of pleasant activities, but another — a city of sinister forces, sordid and threatening, which no "nice" woman ever even brushed with her skirts. She thought of unfortunate women in the sinister city whose lives she had always glibly condemned. Was it true that they were all vicious, all naturally seeking degrada-

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tion? Could it not be true that some of them had been trapped, driven to the wall by circumstances that were too strong for them?

For the first time in her life she approached, even if afar off, the viewpoint of that dark procession of the submerged. And for the first time she was not able to dismiss these pitiful shadows as one of the unpleasant subjects one does not think about. For she seemed to stand close to them, to feel the cold wind of their passing, and with terror she was beginning to recognize the forces that could make them what they were.

She pressed her hands over her eyes as if to shut out the sight of something horrible.

"I could run away," she thought. "I could pack to-night, and early in the morning I could find some place to hide in until I could get some money. Emma would send me some; I could go out to Arizona to join her. Thank God Roger needn't know anything about all this! I must keep it from him, whatever happens. But Emma would have to know — and yet, need I tell her everything? I could just

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tell her that the Shop was not paying — we have closed it for the time being, or something. And I could go out to her. But if there are debts — what can I do about them? What do they do to people who run away from debts? ”

She took a few frantic turns about the room. But finally she came to a stop in the middle of it, despair in her face. “No,” she said slowly, “that won’t do. I can’t run away. I can’t get rid of things that way. I’ve got to face facts. I’ve got to find a way out for myself.”

She was beginning to learn an elementary lesson, painfully, with astonishment and revolt. It is very seldom that a consequence can be shifted. But in her easy and sheltered life there had never been a time when the consequence of any act of hers could not be shared or shifted. It took her breath away now to realize that she stood alone. It made her feel cold, and to escape from this chilly sense of isolation she began to run over in her mind the list of her friends. Would she care to ask even Ada Kent to come to her aid? Among all the women she had had

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at her house, with whom she had played bridge, sat on committees, dined and chatted, was there one she could bear to go to in this perplexity of hers? No, there was not one. The friendships she had made since Roger had brought her to New York were not that kind. Beyond Emma she had no relatives. And she knew, now that she came to consider it closely, that the sisterly relation as interpreted by Emma, would not gracefully stand the strain of the sort of confession she would be obliged to make if she asked Emma for financial aid. Emma would help her, but first she would exclaim, and then she would moralize. And in all probability she would tell Roger, just to convince Roger that he should have taken her advice and stayed at home to look after his wife. No, it would almost be easier to appeal to an absolute stranger than to Emma.

“I won’t tell her!” she thought. “Whatever I am in for, I won’t tell Emma!”

She set her chin. Taking up a candle she went down into the dark shop, with its smell of stale incense and the perfumed pastilles Marian had been

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so fond of. Gathering up all the papers in the desk she brought them upstairs and spread them out upon the table. After which she made herself a pot of coffee, and with this at her elbow she plunged in.

Incredible confusion, heaped up signs of incompetence, carelessness and extravagance. There were even a few of Marian's personal bills among the others. It appeared after the first superficial examination that Marian had paid cash for not more than a third of their stock. The remainder had been bought on credit, or it had been acquired by Marian to be sold on commission. There were half a dozen statements, most of them with curt notes written at the bottom of them from the men who had cleaned and polished some of the pieces Marian bought from old houses. There were bills from the gas and electric companies, from the women who had made the batik draperies for the Shop, from a caterer for the very cakes they had served at the opening of the Shop.

It was two in the morning when Anne finally finished. The papers were in orderly heaps, on a long

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slip a memorandum of her assets and liabilities. The asset column was very brief: a check for fifteen dollars in an unopened letter, a few pieces of furniture, a tea set of doubtful Lowestoft, a few bits of Sheffield silver, all of which Marian had paid for. The liability column was much longer. She added it up, and then she added to the result her share of what they had borrowed from the Colonel. She leaned back in her chair, regarding the dreadful total with a haggard face.

"Now I know," she thought, "what a man feels like when he fails in business."

CHAPTER V

THE week that followed this evening was like a long nightmare. When she had cashed the fortunate check which she had found in the littered desk, and paid off Cleopatra, she had very little money left. She had not yet begun to receive Roger's allotment or the Government allowance she was entitled to, and she had dipped rather too liberally into her cash in hand two weeks before when she bought a new velvet suit she was convinced she could not do without. She now faced the problem of how to appease the most insistent of her creditors, and above all how to find the money to pay off her debt to the Colonel.

It was this debt that worried her more than all the others put together. It was not that she was afraid of him, but he had aroused in her such a sense of physical distaste that to wipe out her indebtedness to him was as necessary as to wash her hands or to

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open a window. She did not want to see him ever again until she had the money in hand to pay him. She had often felt that she had never had quite all the money she wanted to spend, but all her previous longings were mild compared to the frantic need of money that now harassed her. She was in a mood where she would have cut off her hair if she could have sold it for a large sum. And she had all the time so uncomfortable a sense of being an outcast, of furtiveness, a sensation that was not soothed by her talks with her landlord and her creditors. She had a vague idea that perhaps she was not liable for Marian's share of their debts, but she did not have the money to pay a lawyer for advice, and she could not bring herself to haggle with her creditors. In this dilemma she was twice at the point of writing to Roger, to tell him the whole story and indulge herself in the luxury of throwing herself and her burdens on his shoulder. But, as it happened, there came, within twenty-four hours of each other, two delayed letters from Roger. She stopped her packing to read them eagerly, and when she had read the

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last line and then re-read both letters, she knew that she could not write to Roger about her troubles. For in both letters Roger had said over and over that the last thing he thought at night and the first in the morning was that she was safe.

"I can't put into words, dear," he wrote, "what a comfort it is to me to know that you're with Emma, who would look after you if you were to fall sick, and who is glad to give you a home. Of course, I know old Henry is a bit of a bore with his statistics, but you'll put up with him, for my sake, won't you? I know it's bromidic to talk about your 'bit'—but that is it, isn't it? Just being able to say to myself when we're turning in over here: 'It's eight o'clock on Riverside Drive. They've finished dinner, now; the lamps are lighted; Henry has disappeared into the wing chair for forty winks, and the girls are knitting. . . .' just to be able to shut my eyes and see that picture sends me off to sleep with a comfy feeling I can't describe. I've heard other fellows say the same thing, that they never realized before they left home, how much it was going to mean to them over here to know that things were going on well back there. . . ."

When Anne had finished these letters she put her head down on the edge of the trunk she was packing and cried. She felt as if the last prop had been taken from her. And Roger seemed to her so far away, so absorbed in his adventure. To be sure, he chafed at being kept in England when he had hoped they

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would be sent at once to France; they drilled and worked in a sea of mud and there had not been a sunshiny day since he landed. But she could read between the lines a boyish zest in what he was doing. He had burst completely out of one uniform and had not felt so well in years. Their welcome in London had been something never to be forgotten: he had seen King George and had been handed cakes and tea by a Countess in the Green Park. And now all he asked was to go on about the business for which he had enlisted! But he would enlist all over again, if he had the chance, and she was not to worry about him, and she was to have a good time and take care of herself . . .

"No, I can't tell him," Anne said to herself as she wiped her eyes. "I've just got to muddle through, somehow."

The next day she spent in interviewing dealers, for she had decided to sell the Sheraton sideboard she and Roger had found in one happy trip through New England. It was the only piece she possessed that would bring in a sufficiently large sum to pay

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off the Colonel. It was heartbreaking to part with this piece, for Roger had particularly liked it; but she scarcely thought about that side of the transaction in her desperate haste. Twice already the Colonel had telephoned her, and each time she had told him she was altogether too busy to dine with him. But the day that she received a check for the sideboard she telephoned him to ask if he would meet her in the Rose Room of a nearby hotel.

He assented eagerly, and as she entered from the lobby of the hotel he came forward to meet her, smilingly.

"Where on earth have you been?" he demanded. "I called last night — no lights — no answer when I rang! I was afraid you were ill. You'll have some lunch with me now?"

She shook her head. "I only wanted to give you this."

She put into his hand a roll of banknotes, at which he stared in astonishment. "What's this?" he stammered.

"It's my share of our debt to you. Doubtless,

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legally, I'm responsible for Marian's half, but morally I don't consider myself so — since, as you told me, you knew she was not to be depended on. Will you please sign this? ”

“ But — but what have you done? How have you arranged —— ”

“ I have sold some of my things and got the dealers to take back most of the stuff in the shop — at least the things that weren't paid for. It was the only thing they could do! ”

“ But, my dear little girl, how unnecessary! Why didn't you let me —— ”

“ Will you sign this, please? ”

She pushed toward him the receipt she had made out. He stared from the paper to her face. Then with a shrug of his shoulders he signed. She folded the paper into her purse and rose, ignoring the hand he put out to detain her.

“ But I shall see you,” he exclaimed. “ Surely there is something I can do for you. By Jove! I don't want to see you heckled by creditors when the whole thing's been no fault of yours! Won't you

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have dinner with me to-night? You have to eat, you know!"

"I've been lucky enough to find a tenant who will take the Shop off my hands almost immediately. The apartment, also I have managed to sublet. So, of course, I'm tremendously busy. I shall probably not see you again, for I may go to join my sister. Yes, it will be delightful for the spring. I really must hurry away, now. Good-by."

She turned away, having successfully overlooked his extended hand, and walked quickly out of the hotel. Her cheeks were burning, she felt an exhilarated sense of relief. But when she had walked a block or two her pace slowed and her heart sank. For, after all, she had lied; she could not have gone to Emma without growing wings — unless she went into the nearest telegraph office and wired Emma for money. Should she do that? Should she make a meal of her pride and confess to Emma that she had failed? That would mean confessing also to Roger. Now that she had sold their beloved sideboard, Roger would sooner or later have to have some sort of

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explanation. Her pride winced at the thought. Roger had hinted more than once that she was none too competent — what would he think of her now?

She reached the Shop, unlocked it and went in. It was a sad place, dimmed by the drawn orange curtains, dusty and smelling of stale incense. She knew she should hate the smell of pastilles to her dying day. Making her way among the few pieces of furniture that still remained to be disposed of, she climbed the stairs to the rooms above. Here, too, there were all the dreary signs of departure, half-packed trunks, a dreadful gap where the Sheraton sideboard had stood, tables and chairs shrouded ready to go to the storage house. She felt as if there were no spot on earth that was hers. Regarding herself in a dusty mirror with a sort of incredulous astonishment she thought:

“Well, you *have* come a cropper, Anne Henderson! And what are you going to do next?”

CHAPTER VI

IN the next few days Anne Henderson learned that as an economic unit in this busy world she ranked somewhere near the bottom. For after the day when she had seen the Colonel and paid off her debt to him her courage took a turn for the better. That night had marked the ebb-tide of her spirit; the next morning she arose with a determination to give herself another chance. She had the bouyancy of youth; moreover she had the intrepidity of ignorance.

“I am not really stupid,” she said to herself, as she made her coffee in the partly dismantled kitchen, “I have a few good clothes left, I have a good manner, I am rather good to look at. Why shouldn’t I find something to do that won’t be too difficult, that won’t take up all my time, and will pay my way until Roger comes back?”

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She was not aware that this was the ideal of every dilettante, the sure short cut to mediocrity. She wanted some of the advantages of the butterfly, with the compensation of the worker. She had yet to learn the meaning of work for work's sake, and she had no definite ambition of any sort. Her job had been matrimony, and now it was taken away from her, at least for the time being.

There were still a few tiresome details to attend to, her furniture to be sent back to storage, and the half dozen pieces of furniture that remained in the Shop to be sold to the best advantage possible. These tasks took up her entire attention for several days. She had decided to take a small, furnished apartment for a month. By that time her allowance and allotment would have arrived, and she would have made up her mind what she wanted to do. When Emma went to Arizona, she had thriftily rented her apartment to an acquaintance, so Anne knew that when the new tenant took possession of her own present rooms she would be literally without a home.

She spent three days tramping through the neigh-

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borhoods she felt would be suitable for her to live in, interviewing agents and looking at apartments, her spirits sinking before the discouraging evidence that a small, well furnished apartment in what she considered the right locality would cost far more than she could afford. The month's rent in advance would leave her for food about what she had been in the habit of spending for flowers for her table. And what if before the end of the month her allowance did not come? She felt dismay creeping over her. It was at the end of a long day's search that, returning to her own rooms, she looked down a cross street in the Fifties and saw the sign: *Furnished Rooms*. It was in a block of old brownstone houses. Some of them had had their basements converted into French laundries or tailor shops, and there was a brewery which, as if it read the handwriting on the wall, already had its windows boarded up. She felt a strong distaste for that particular block, but this was no time to be fastidious. In two days she would be obliged to give up the *Madison*

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Avenue apartment. She rang the bell under the Furnished Room sign.

A woman in a dusting cap, whose brown eyes looked as if nature had meant them to be kind but life had taught them to be suspicious, showed her a room up two flights, at the back of the house.

"Fer yerself alone?" she inquired, hesitating before she mounted the stairs, her suspicious eyes on Anne's pretty face.

"For myself alone," Anne sighed. Then an instinct told her frankness would be best. "My husband is in the Army. I have to give up my apartment and live more cheaply. If you would like a reference ——"

She hesitated, for she did not know whether she wanted to refer this woman to any of her friends. But the woman saved her by giving a hard laugh. "I don't never need no references, as long as the room rent is paid in advance every Saturday night. And if one of my roomers don't behave themselves, I can 'tend to that pretty quick!"

The room proved to be fairly decent, although

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it had a heartrending green iron bed, and a red Brussels carpet. But the carpet was mercifully faded. The window curtains were fresh, although gray-white from much laundering. There was the musty smell of a room that has been closed before being quite aired after the last occupant. The woman explained that they were all women on that floor, and there were two bathrooms among them. Anne shuddered as she thought of those two bathrooms. She asked to see them. They were not so bad as she had expected. The etiquette of them was hinted at by a can of cleanser on the edge of the tub, with the succinct note pinned to the wall above it: "Use this for the sake of the next one!"

Anne read this absent-mindedly, for she was busy making a calculation in her head. If she took this room, she might be uncomfortable, but at any rate she would feel safe until her allowance came, even if she did not find anything to do. And, after all, nobody need know her address except the post-office people. She paid the woman a week's rent and took a receipt.

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Next day she took possession. The first thing she did after unpacking a few necessary articles of clothing, was to sit down with a newspaper and to read, for the first time in her life, the "Help Wanted — Female" columns.

When she had finished, she laid down the paper and stared hard at the dingy wallpaper behind her bed. She had not dreamed there could be in all the world so inexorable a demand for experience — also for references. It occurred to her that she had neither. After she had read the columns again, she found she had gleaned a scant half dozen that might fit her case, from the two hundred positions waiting to be filled.

Next morning she started out to make her first application for a job. The advertisement she answered called for a young woman of good address to act as Field Secretary in the Club Department of a large Corporation. She had not the slightest idea what were the duties of a Field Secretary, but she was certain she had a good address; so it was with a certain blitheness of spirit that she entered

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a small waiting-room and gave her name to a polite young man.

She was sixth in a row of eight women waiting for that position. Just ahead of her was a girl in a severe, well-fitting black cloth suit, low-heeled russet shoes and a mannish little hat. As this young person waited she improved the shining hour with a book on Commercial Spanish. Fifteen minutes after she had been shown into the interviewing room, the polite young man thanked the waiting row and told them they could go; the position had been filled.

"I knew that girl would get it," thought Anne, making a mental note of the low-heeled russet shoes and the Commercial Spanish. "She looked as if she had earned her living from the cradle."

After that she answered an advertisement for a social worker for orphan children, but lost interest when she found she was to live as well as work with the orphans. She also offered herself at a Settlement House, where she found to her surprise that Settlement workers have to be specially trained nowadays. Next she applied at a mail order house

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and came away horrified when she learned what the wages were. "I couldn't live on that!" she told herself.

At other places also she discovered that inexperience can be bought cheap. Her good appearance was actually against her. Every one seemed looking for girls not over seventeen, who could be readily broken in to the job, and Anne did not look the part. Forewomen received her suspiciously; one of them asked her if she was writing a book. She came near getting a position in a Woman's Exchange, until she confessed that she knew very little about salesmanship.

It was now late in the afternoon. She was more tired than she ever remembered being in her life, and having lunched on a sandwich and a cup of cocoa at a soda fountain, she was very hungry. Beset by a sudden overpowering sense of loneliness she went into a telephone booth, called up Ada Kent and invited herself to dinner with her and Sam.

"My dear!" came back Ada's voice. "I'm so sorry, but we're dining out to-night. Can't you

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come to-morrow night — no, to-morrow night's taken — how about Sunday? Tell you what — I'll call you up at the Shop when I've had time to find out what Sam's engagements are."

"Don't call up the Shop," returned Anne faintly. "I've sold it. Marian was called away and we — we both got rather tired of the whole thing. I'm not staying there at all, now."

"But where are you living? Emma hasn't come back, has she? What are you doing, Anne?"

"Oh, I'm just resting, now!"

"Well —:" Ada's tone indicated that her thoughts had already flown somewhere else — "come and see me, sometime, won't you?"

Anne walked out of the drug store with the sensation of being a forlorn ghost. Ada had not even asked for her address. She seemed to have dropped out of her own world, and there was no place for her in any other. The very city had become strange to her. Her wanderings had left her among the loft buildings of lower Fifth Avenue. Out of these buildings and from all the side streets began to pour the

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great alien horde of garment workers. The black tide of them set eastward across town. From a shelter of a doorway she stood watching them with unhappy eyes. She noted first with distaste their stunted size, men and girls alike, and then the cheapness of their clothes, the efforts of the girls to catch the style of the minute, the black stubble that appeared common to every male chin, and their crude voices as they jostled past her. She, who was American of the oldest American stock, sheltered all her life according to the best ideal of the American man, felt infinitely superior to these underbred aliens. And at the same time a voice inside her said:

“These girls have got work. See how sturdily they step out, how gay they are. How do they manage to keep themselves so neat? Could you do it? Could you go to a strange country, learn the language, get a job, and laugh the way these girls are laughing? Could you pick up the styles of that country, the very slang, make yourself a home, and

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go back to it at night swinging along the way these girls are doing? ”

She turned away with a shiver. “I believe I’ll telegraph Emma to-morrow,” she thought.

But the next morning some of her buoyancy had returned. After going over the advertisements in the morning paper, she walked across town to a small and rather exclusive cloak and suit firm on Fifth Avenue. When she got there the position advertised had just been filled, they told her, but would she care to consider one as a model in the evening wrap department? The manager appeared to appreciate her hair and her good carriage. Anne hesitated. She most certainly did not want to be a model, but, on the other hand, neither was it pleasant to contemplate trying to get along on the money she had until her check came from the Government. With a feeling that perhaps this was her best chance, she accepted the position.

She was immediately taken in charge by a woman called Madame Irene, who was as lean as a pencil in her black silk dress that fitted her like a sheath from

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her chin to her ankles. Her hair, too much henna-ed, was banded in metallic waves across her forehead and done in a Greek knot at the back. Anne thought her a dreadful person, with her imitation French accent, but there was a certain authority about Madame Irene that made Anne feel meek. Leading Anne to a dressing-room she made her put on a straight, severe gown of pale gray, which was a sort of uniform for the models. It was of some thin stuff that fell in soft folds. Cut a little low in the neck, and supplemented by pale gray silk stockings and slippers, it was demurely becoming. Throwing a flaming flamingo-like evening wrap over Anne's shoulders Madame Irene said briefly: "Sit down. Walk around."

"No! Not like that! Ferget yerself!" There being no customer within hearing distance, Madame Irene took off her French accent and lapsed into one more homelike. "Don't act as if y' wanted to hide behind that screen. Remember, y're just coming into the opera, and that's the most stunning coat in the wold. Walk kind of languid, but not indiffer-

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ent. Remember this, dearie: half the customers in our evening wrap department bring a man with 'em. It's the man you've got to knock down with that wrap. Now watch!"

She swept the wrap from Anne's shoulders, and placed two chairs near each other. "That's the lady!" she indicated the right hand chair, "and this is her friend. He's probably old and half color-blind, but he won't miss a move of yours. Agnes!" A girl in gray came forward. "You're selling this coat. I'm the model."

Two more girls in gray came out of the dressing-room and drew near with expectant smiles. "She's as good as the theater!" laughed one of them.

"Now, Agnes!" said Irene, then withdrew up stage and assumed a respectful, waiting air. Agnes spread the cloak before the two chairs. "This, madame, came in only yesterday from Cheruit. Would you like to see it on the model? Fifine!"

Irene came down stage with an indescribable mixture of languid hauteur and respectful submission. She put her arms into the cloak as Agnes held it for

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her. With one hand she held the black fur of it up against her chin, while the other was outstretched gracefully as if some one had at that instant helped her from her motor car. Slowly she turned her back on the two chairs and walked away from them. It was plain to be seen that she was threading her way among admiring acquaintances at the opera, or perhaps at a Royal Audience. She now and then extended a hand, which displayed the draping of the sleeve, she turned to give the two chairs a side view as she smiled up into an invisible face, she slowly came down the room again with the cloak swinging open to reveal her marvelous slimness. And as she came in front of the left hand chair — the seat of the ghostly friend of Madame, the customer — she smiled down at him the most amazing smile, intimately knowing — as who should say: “You and I, my friend, understand each other, because we alone of all present understand true *chic*!”

The other models giggled. “Ain’t she the limit!”

Anne was torn between admiration and a desire

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to laugh wildly. "I'm afraid I never can do that!" she said faintly.

"Oh, yes, you can with practice," returned Irene complacently. "You know an evening wrap from a boudoir gown, which none of these other goils do, never having had either. Now we'll try again. I'm selling the coat and you're the model. Wait up there near the door."

Over and over the farcical process they went until Anne was ready to drop. But although she despised Madame Irene and her frank lack of ethics in selling methods, she, somehow, liked her. She had a shrewd wit, and her eyes when no one was looking were kind. One of the other models told Anne later that the firm paid Irene a higher salary than any of the other saleswomen because only she could handle certain rich but difficult customers.

Anne came back at eight-thirty next morning. As a customer rarely arrived before ten, all of the models helped in arranging the showrooms, running errands between the stock and the great workroom at the back, and otherwise making themselves useful. Then

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they donned their gray chifions, powdered and rouged very skillfully and pulled on their gray stockings. Presently a young girl in black with a white Swiss apron would come running back. "Elise! Forward!" And a girl would go out, with a bored air, but with her eyes lighting up. They liked slipping their arms into the soft satins and velvets, feeling the luxurious fur around their faces, seeing their prettiness increased tenfold by the wonderful garments. Their manner, their gait, their very expressions changed the moment they put on a Lanvin or a Jenny model.

But Anne hated it, at first. The blood was in her cheeks as she exhibited before her first customer. "What an awful way to make a living!" she thought. Then, as she saw herself in a mirror, she felt somewhat consoled. She had never looked so well! Why, she was beautiful! That is what the right kind of clothes would do for her! Then her sense of humor asserted itself. She smiled into the deep fur of the collar around her neck. She recognized that she had indulged in exactly the sort of thought that

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is supposed to come to the moving-picture, "easiest-way" heroine. And she reflected: "We're all a good deal alike under our skins!"

For ten days she put on and took off luxurious garments walking slowly up and down the gray mirrored rooms, before the critical eyes of customers, saleswomen and Madame Irene. She was only a half success because she never took the job seriously. Half the time she was inwardly laughing at herself and at the customers who took the choosing of an evening wrap with so deadly an anxiety, and the other half she was bored and disgusted. Sometimes, when she was exhibiting an unusually beautiful garment to a customer, she considered the "right sort," she took a keen pleasure in showing off the best points of the wrap, and on these occasions Madame Irene looked at her approvingly. But these times were few. She was merely marking time until something pushed her in another direction. She felt rather apathetic, very lonely and a little abused by circumstances.

Her attitude towards the other models was polite

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but a trifle aloof. As they did not understand her, they let her severely alone. And yet, her mental condescension toward them was beginning to be troubled by an unwilling admiration. How did they manage to keep themselves so neat, their hair so burnished, their nails so twinkling, their street suits so up to the minute, on the wages they received? She gathered from their interminable gossip that their knowledge of where to go for the smartest clothes for the least money, of where to get the best food for the smallest expenditure, was amazing. They were all experts in the art of keeping the show-window shining. And they were hardy experts in human nature, especially male human nature. They were exceedingly wary of one another, which showed how much they respected their own sex. They talked constantly, but told little. They never read a book or a newspaper, in the many quarter hours when they sat about the dressing-room, but their powers of observation were enormous. They had no ambitions, few ideals, that Anne could discover. And yet, she could not entirely despise them. They

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were such expert swimmers in the difficult waters of life! They made her feel ashamed of her own floundering attempts to keep herself afloat.

But she was not destined to remain long in their company. One day as she was putting away some wraps she had just been exhibiting, she heard a familiar voice in the room behind one of the gray partitions. She knew it at once for the voice of Ada Kent. A flush of horror went over her. This was the last thing she had expected to happen, for none of the women she knew could afford, as a usual thing, an evening wrap from this house. She had felt secure in that respect. But Ada had apparently brought in a friend from out of town, for she could hear her explaining that she had brought Mrs. Richmond because so-and-so had found such a wonderful electric blue coat there, and couldn't they show her something without waiting for an appointment?

"Of course, we nevaire do zat," Anne could hear Irene explaining, "but since Madame is from out of town — possiblee — v'la! I weel call a mannequin!"

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Anne's skin crept. As she came through the large room she had observed that it was a busy morning. The chances were that Irene would call her. How horrible, how unbearable to hear Ada Kent's exclamation as her friend appeared in the gray uniform of a model. It would not be quite so bad if Ada were alone. But in a flash she could imagine Ada's embarrassment before her wealthy out-of-town friend, her effort to disentangle herself from the situation. No, she could not face it! She dropped the cloak she had been about to put away, and ran fleetly down the little corridor that extended behind the fitting cabinets. The dressing-room was empty. She closed the door and frantically unhooked her gray frock. She was taking her own street clothes from her locker when the little messenger girl called "Silvia! Forward!"

"Yes!" cried "Silvia." But in two minutes more she was slipping down the corridor toward the employees' exit. Fortunately it was nearing the luncheon hour; already the girls from the work-room were going out, and she slipped out among them.

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She had swiftly walked two blocks before she became fully conscious of what she had done. She had thrown away her first real job because of a snobbish and cowardly impulse. She was divided between a hysterical desire to laugh and a rush of tears. For, of course, she could not go back. She would now be tortured by the fear of running on to Ada Kent or some of her friends, and perhaps the firm would not take her back, anyway. Discipline was sharp in that place. No, she most certainly would not go back. She would prefer to lose the three days' wages due her.

"The Lord, Himself, can't help a perfect fool!" she jibed at herself furiously.

Then as she walked slowly along, depression and uncertainty followed on the heels of her self-contempt. After all, how silly she was to submit herself to such experiences, when there was no real necessity. She had only to send a wire to Emma to receive money for a ticket west. She had only, as it were, to step through a door back into the pleasant, comfortable world where young matrons are

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taken care of, adored, clothed and amused, with the smallest outlay of effort in return.

She came to a full stop before the blue lettered window of a telegraph office. She stood there staring at her reflection in the glass. She looked like any one of the hundreds of cherished daughters and young wives who were walking up and down Fifth Avenue at that moment. Her suit and her furs, her gloves and boots were still smart and in the mode, her face had the fresh, unlined beauty of the woman who has always walked in pleasant ways. But within she was a failure. Where was that jaunty self-confidence with which she had set out to convince Emma and Roger that she was a competent, clever person? All gone, or at least temporarily crushed. The least of those mannequins back there in the shop was better fitted to keep herself alive than she was.

And, yet, she had always considered herself and Ada Kent, for instance, capable and rather gifted. Their homes were furnished with cleverness and, to their own way of thinking, with a quite high degree of artistic ability, most of which they had acquired

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from magazines like *The World and the Flesh* or *La Mode*. Their frocks were as smart and expensive as any human being could manage on their dress allowance. Their little dinners were always accompanied by the latest thing in the arrangement of flowers, in entrées and in the style of the maids' aprons. Their husbands did not stray from the hearthstone, and sometimes their wives' names appeared in a society column. Why should not these wives consider themselves successes? But by whose standards were they measured? She was beginning to suspect that she and Ada Kent and the other women of their immediate circle had set their own standards. It struck her, in this moment of most unusual reflection, that they had been rather easy standards. What, after all, had any of them known about the real world where men and women swam and struggled against deep, terrible currents, where many of them went under and others just managed to keep afloat?

These were unusual and painful thoughts for Anne Henderson to be entertaining. They had never visited her before, except on the night Marian went

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away and the Colonel called. And on that night she had been still full of confidence, underneath her fright. But to-day she was more distrustful of herself than she had ever been in her life. She opened her purse. A telegram to Emma would cost a dollar. She had only to go in there, write a few words on one of those yellow forms she could see through the glass — and she would be back in her old snug harbor.

But she did not go in. Something in that tremendous world of workers whose edges she had brushed in the past ten days had reached out and got hold of her. She did not know it, but some pride in her deeper than any of the petty vanity she had ever known was keeping her from acknowledging her failure. A latent ambition, a will-to-accomplish which had been smothered in the softness of her life was stirring in her, underneath her surface fears. She came of ancestors who had been workers and fighters; it was no fault of her inheritance that she was flabby. Some instinct to sustain herself never called out in her before had been goaded awake in

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the stress of the last week. She revolted against it, turning wistfully toward the ease and softness of her old life — but still she did not send her telegram to Emma.

CHAPTER VII

THE next morning she slept late and was dressing languidly, trying to decide what should be her next move, when a letter was pushed under her door. She gave a little cry of joy as she saw that it was from Roger. His letters had been dreadfully slow in coming, arriving sometimes in bunches of three and four. And to think of one coming on this morning of all mornings when she needed one so much! She tore it open and glanced at the beginning.

“Somewhere in France:”—so at last it had come—he had got his wish, he had reached the front. The letter at the beginning was jubilant in tone. It looked, he said, as if their period of training was about over, as if they were actually to be used, at last. They were billeted in a tiny French village not two miles behind the lines; he was accustomed, now,

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to going to sleep to the deep rumble of far-off guns. "And whom do you suppose I met the other day, Anne? It would be astonishing if there weren't the most amazing reunions occurring all the time. Do you remember the boy I told you about who enlisted just after we entered the war, Snubby, the boy in our drafting room? Used to be a pestiferous cub, always teasing the stenographers and singing through his nose? Well, the kid is a Sergeant, now, and the straightest, liveliest soldier of the Company. Funny, how I met him. Ackwell and I — Ack is my chum, a Technology man from Boston — were coming back from a long, wet, cold day's work on a new barracks, and the little old village looked mighty good to us. It had cleared up a little and the low sun behind us flooded the yellow stone walls of the houses and the heaped up masses of clouds with a rich saffron glow. They were shelling a battery to our left and we were watching the bursts when suddenly we noticed a difference in the whine of the shells. We ducked for a ditch, and as we ran I turned my head and caught a glimpse of a picture that sticks in my

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mind. The shells were landing around the village cemetery. Two women and a child were running for cover, driving their cow before them. It looked for all the world like a pantomime in a wonderful setting: the rich deep green grass in the foreground, the black figures silhouetted against the glowing wall, the tall, decorative black trees of the cemetery, and back of it, dwarfing and making everything toylike and unreal, the huge, piled-up mass of saffron clouds. One woman had been gathering greens, her skirt was full of them, one arm was bent over her head as she ran. The cow came to the cemetery wall and refused, cow-like, to see the gate. At that instant a shell struck uncomfortably near. Ack and I simultaneously lay down in our ditch. But pretty soon I raised my head to see how the women and the cow were coming on. The cow, now completely rattled, was headed straight for the open country — and the Front. Both women were running after the cow. You see, that cow meant, probably, everything in the world to them, besides being a good friend of long standing. The little child was crouched down

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against the cemetery wall looking sadly after them. Ack and I half rose from our ditch, when out of the safety of the cemetery there shot a long legged doughboy, and zip! he was up the road after that cow. He turned her about and drove her into the cemetery gate whooping as if he was driving a herd of buffalo. The women and the child scuttled in after him. In a few minutes the shelling let up. As we emerged from our ditch the volunteer cowboy came along the road, singing. When I heard that voice I stopped — and it was Snubby! Well, nothing would do but we must go to his billet for supper. I wish you could have seen that room of Snubby's. He and two other fellows had hired a little back room from an old Frenchman they called the Pirate. The entrance was through a stable with restive mules, rabbits and hens and no lights allowed, through a door with one hinge, down two steps — and there you were. There was just room for their three beds (made of chicken wire and duck boards), one stool and a box before the fireplace, garlands of wet socks and puttees, windows patched with a shelter half,

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muddy boots and slickers, gas masks and helmets. But there were from six to nine of us in there that evening. The night we met Snubby, Ack had got a box of fruit cake from his girl, and Snubby said he knew of an old lady who loved him dearly and who would sell him half a ham. What a feast we had! Nothing in the world ever tasted so good, with the candles lighted, the fire crackling, and the distant rumble of the guns. Snubby and I talked our heads off about the boss and the office and Tommy Greeley (who took my place, you know) and good old Charley Drierson. Funny, how glad I was to see that boy! He's improved a hundred per cent., and he says when he gets back home he's going to the boss and tell him he wants to learn the business from the bottom up. Talking with him about things back there seemed to bring it all so close to us both. I realized, as I never have before, how decent the boss has been to all of us, what a chance we all had to work up. What we've seen over here makes America look good to us in a way it never did before. Not that I'm homesick, my dear, though I'd give 'most any-

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thing to see you right now. No, I'm too full of a kind of excitement that isn't excitement because it's so serene. It's hard to put into words — I guess it's just an extraordinarily deep happiness. . . . Your letter just came telling me that Emma and Henry have gone to Arizona. Why didn't you go with them? And what is this Madison Avenue address? You speak about being with Marian Beal, about some kind of business. Who is she? and what is the business? I don't like the idea of your being in New York alone. Look here, I want you to write and promise me that if you should need advice or help in any way you will go to see Frank Leavitt. I know that for my sake he would help you in any way possible. He has always been fine and square with me, and I shall feel that you have a good friend if you ever appeal to him. . . ."

Anne re-read this letter as she ate her breakfast at a small restaurant near her lodging house. She had made her letters purposely rather vague about her venture with Marian, and she had not had the courage to tell him as yet of her failure. A letter

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such as this one made a gloomy letter from her more of an impossibility than ever. There had never been a word from Roger of discomforts, or danger, or weariness; his letters made her feel ashamed of the self-pity she indulged in. Sometime, when he had come back, she would tell him about Marian and the shop and the evening wraps, sometime when they could laugh together over these episodes. At present she felt they were a bit too near to her to be laughed at.

It was odd that the letter from Roger should have contained Frank Leavitt's name, for only that morning before she arose she had wondered if it would not be the sensible thing to go to Roger's former employer and tell him frankly that she needed advice. She had not been sure Roger would like her to do this, but now this uncertainty was settled. She did not want to go Leavitt, a man she knew in a semi-social way, and tell him that she had to earn some money and didn't know how to do it. But, on the other hand, it would be easier to go to him than to Ada Kent's husband, for instance.

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An hour later she was standing in the outer room of the Leavitt Company, Engineers and Builders, asking Daisy, the telephone girl, if she could have a moment with Mr. Leavitt. She had been in the offices half a dozen times before when she was to meet Roger for lunch, and she knew by sight several of the men Roger often spoke of. Frank Leavitt, the head of the company, had always seemed fond of Roger, and had played golf with them and dined with them once or twice. He rose and came to meet her as his stenographer ushered her in.

"Nothing wrong with Roger, I hope?" he inquired as they shook hands.

"No, no. From his last letter he is having a wonderful time!" She drew a long breath to steady herself. "The trouble is with me. I wonder if you will give me some advice. You see, I want to earn some money, and I don't know how to start in."

She saw the subtle hardening that comes into a business man's face when he is confronted by a favor-hunter, and she reddened. This was going to be

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harder than she thought. Leavitt looked at her with a keen, hazel eye.

"I understood Roger to say you would live with your sister, Mrs. Henderson?"

Anne explained that her sister had gone away for the spring, and she hadn't cared to go with her. "If I could find something I could do," Anne murmured, "I would much rather be independent."

Mr. Leavitt tapped meditatively with a pencil. "What can you do? I mean, have you had any special training?"

She had to admit that she had not. "But I am willing to do almost anything—suitable," she added.

Leavitt smiled a trifle wearily. "That is the difficulty, isn't it? A suitable occupation for a well bred woman who has had no training!" He looked down at his pencil, meditating for a moment. "I think, if you would care to try it, we could give you something here in our offices. But, of course, I won't guarantee that it will be suitable! And the pay won't be much to start on. But there is an oppor-

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tunity for a clever woman to make a place for herself in our organization — if she wants to. Suppose you come to-morrow morning, and after a trial if you find you don't care for the work, or — frankly — if we find we can't use you, we can part amicably."

A few months earlier Anne would have resented his cool and business-like tone, but she was in a chastened frame of mind just now. She accepted his suggestion in a tone equally cool and business like. "I'd like to try, at any rate. I'll be here in the morning."

She took up her new job in a mixed sort of spirit. She wanted to succeed in it, but she had not yet come to feel that it was vitally necessary for her to succeed. She took it up with all her ladylikeness upon her; she was the wife of a man who had held an important position there, moreover she knew many of Mr. Leavitt's friends. She felt that it would be very difficult for her to accept her weekly pay envelope from his hands. And what would be the attitude of the other employees toward her? she wondered. She was Roger's wife, and a young woman of personal

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and social charms; naturally she expected to be treated by them as a person deserving a certain amount of deference.

It was a decided surprise to her when she found that her advent as a member of the organization scarcely caused a ripple. Miss Rickman, the boss's stenographer, named her to Evans, the traffic man, and to Tommy Greeley, who had stepped up into Roger's shoes. They asked politely after Roger, hoped she would like her new work, and took themselves off with abstracted brows. They appeared to be in a hurry just at that moment. It was Miss Rickman who initiated her into her new job.

Miss Rickman (they all called her Ricky) was a dark young woman with an Hebraic nose, beautiful eyes, and a clever mouth. Anne's first impression of her was that her hair needed washing; but later she was to envy and admire Ricky.

"Now, let me see," mused Ricky, jabbing a pencil into her hair the while she absently re-read a stenographic note. "I think Maggie needs help on the files. It's kind of a pity you wore that dress."

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Anne looked down at the navy blue taffeta with organdie collar and cuffs, which she had chosen because it was at once plain and becoming. She had seen herself being given some light, clean work in Mr. Leavitt's own office. "What is the matter with this dress?" she asked innocently.

"It's much too good," said Ricky. "But you can take this black apron of mine, and — here, I'll fix you some paper cuffs. Filing is dusty work, especially transferring — that's what Maggie is doing just now."

"Am I to be an assistant to Maggie?" Anne asked.

"Yes," said Miss Rickman, smiling in a peculiar way. "But if she gets too fresh, you come to me."

When Anne saw Maggie she felt a flash of resentment against Mr. Leavitt. Maggie was seventeen. When fetched from some lurking place — "she's a born loafer," said Ricky — she was chewing gum with a slow, mournful insolence. . . . Her black hair was plastered in wet scallops to her plump cheeks. She had the thickest ankles Anne had ever seen;

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between her scant blue serge skirt and the tops of her shoes two inches of flesh-colored stocking showed. She looked Anne over with a mixture of curiosity and scorn.

"Mrs. Henderson can go on with the transferring — it's about wore me out," said Maggie to Ricky.

"Don't hurt yourself, Maggie," said Ricky, sarcastically. "And now that you've got help you might look up that Whitby correspondence you lost last week."

"I never did!" cried Maggie. "You never give it to me. I guess you're human yourself — I guess you make mistakes like other people ——"

"S-sh!" warned Ricky, as Mr. Leavitt's door opened.

Maggie scuttled down the hall and Anne followed her with a sense of indignation, mingled with a desire to laugh. It was too absurd — putting her to work under a creature like Maggie.

But all that day she worked in silence. It became a grim silence, for her pride would not let her show how depressed she was. Never having had an as-

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sistant before, power went to Maggie's head. She lolled in luxurious ease in a chair behind her table while Anne fetched and carried, lifted out files and climbed up and down a short ladder to top shelves. The filing cases were in a small room by themselves. There was only one chair, and Maggie occupied that, so that when Anne found a moment to rest she perched on top of the stepladder. Maggie regaled her, as her mood relaxed, with tales of the jobs, classy jobs, she could have by merely turning over her hand, and of the "gent-mun friend" with whom she had quarreled and made up the night before.

And Anne kept on thinking: "This is where Roger earned our living. Every day he came down that hall, and went into that long room there . . . and he may never work here again. . . ."

She had not felt so poignantly near and yet so separated from him since he went away. If it had not been for her disdain of Maggie she would have broken down long before that interminable day was over. As it was she kept saying to herself:

"I will not go through another day like this. I

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will not come back to-morrow — I'll write some kind of an excuse to Mr. Leavitt . . . I'll telegraph to Emma to-morrow. I can't bear it."

Transferring, that is, the weeding out and permanent filing of important correspondence, necessitates the opening of many cases on which the dust of weeks has gathered. Before night Anne's beautifully kept hands were grimy and rough, there was dust in her hair, in her nostrils. She was disheveled and so tired she ached from head to foot. Maggie was as fresh as paint. Maggie had learned the art of saving herself!

That night Anne was a long time in going to sleep. She was too tired — or perhaps it was that bitter cup of coffee she had drunk. She lay thinking, her eyes on the gray oblong of the window, through which the street lights shone. At first she could think of nothing but her own discomfort, the lumpy bed, the stale odors of the carpet and the pillows. She shrank with distaste at the thought of the long line of human semi-failures that had slept in that bed before her. The very walls of the room seemed to

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give out melancholy exhalations. She was oppressed more than ever by a sense of the nightmare quality of her experiences of the past week.

It was impossible for her to go on like that, she thought. Roger would be humiliated if he knew about Maggie and the filing, about Mr. Leavitt's cool, businesslike attitude toward her, about the smallness of the salary they offered her. And then suddenly it came to her; this was the very way Roger had begun.

Once, early in their marriage, they had chanced to be in this very neighborhood and Roger had suddenly stopped at a cross-street to point out to her a row of old brick houses. That was where he had lived when he first came to New York, he had told her—in a furnished room which he shared with another young fellow from his home town.

“My dear! wasn't it awful?” she had asked him.

“No, I don't remember that it was. I was full of pep and ambition. I was glad to get a start, even at the bottom. I did anything they had for me, from filing up.”

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From filing, up! He had worked through almost every department of the building business, beginning with the very details that she had endured to-day. Week after week, year after year, he had gone down to his filing, or his time-keeping, to his superintendent's job and finally to the estimating department of which he was now the chief. And after they were married she had taken his working life as much for granted as she had taken those years before he and she discovered they loved each other. It was a man's part to work at his job, and a woman's to keep his home and spend his salary. What he really did during the day interested her but little.

But now she had had one day in Roger's shoes. And she understood one thing that had puzzled her about Roger in the last days before he sailed with his Company; she knew now something of the cause of the expression of peace that had come into his eyes. It had seemed to her strange that a man, giving up his career, perhaps his very life, should wear that look in his eyes; but she understood now that in giving himself up to become part of the machinery

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of war he had put off a burden, heavy, complex and with him night and day — the burden of business.

She lay there thinking with a sober clearness she had never known before. She seemed to see all over the land men putting off the burden of business to fight the fight for decency and honor, and in their places women taking the burden up. They were taking them up because they were forced to: how were they going to acquit themselves once they had shouldered them? Were they going to whimper, were they going to make the foolish, futile mistakes she had made, were they going to refuse the burden and take refuge with the nearest Emma? And when their men came back were some of them going to find their wives as ineffectual, as narrow, as soft-spirited and soft-handed as when they went away? . . .

“But I hate it!” she cried. “I hate living like this, in this shabby, grimy way. How can I do it? How can I go on repeating to-day, week after week? It’s too much to expect of me — I won’t do it! I can’t!”

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Then another voice said within her quietly:
“Roger did it, year after year. . . .”

She got up, went across to the window and looked down at the street. In semi-shabby, forgotten streets like this, in furnished rooms like this, Roger had lived and worked during those years when she was a girl, protected, petted and happy in the prettiest butterfly way. Then, as soon as he had been able to lift himself out of shabby streets and mean rooms, he had married her — and she had gone on being a butterfly. He had carried her on his shoulders, and in return she had given him the half careless, half condescending love of the American young girl. . . .

Her thoughts took nō such definite shape as these words, but they pressed in on her in a vague, uneasy questioning of herself, with now and then a vivid picture of the past. For the first time in her life her belief in her right to a golden destiny was shaken. She tried to remind herself that she had always made Roger's home attractive, that she had always been cheerful and humored him in his moods, that she had

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put no straw (except remonstrances) in the way of his going to France.

But the memory of his tired eyes after an unusually hard day tormented her. That expression in his eyes had a meaning for her, now, after one day in the place where he had worked.

Her heart suddenly ached with longing for him. There was a feeling that had never been there before, as if she wanted to press his head against her breast, to comfort him for the loss of something she might have given him, but never had. Wrapping herself in a warm robe she lighted the gas and got out her writing materials.

"DEAREST ROGER: Only a short note written before I go to sleep to tell you that you musn't worry about my not going to Arizona with Emma. I am going to get along beautifully by myself, and it will be much better for me. I have taken your advice about going to see Mr. Leavitt. In fact—be prepared for a surprise, Roger!—I now have a job with the Company. Yes, a real job with a salary and all. And I know I am going to like it immensely. They are all very kind to me. I like Ricky and Tommy Greeley and Mr. Evans. The work doesn't seem to be difficult at all—"

Her heart grew lighter, her pen flew. After all, this was going to be rather an amusing game, to fool

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Roger. If he could stick, so could she! If he could write her from the mud and cold and horror over there cheerful letters about his pals and sunsets and amusing cows, she could write him cheerful lies about her adventures in wage-earning.

And when he got home, all this would be as if it had never been, as if they had dreamed it, both of them.

CHAPTER VIII

THEN there began for her a period in which she found herself cast for a rôle she had never dreamed herself playing. There were a number of things she had to learn painfully, and a number of other things she had to unlearn with equal difficulty. In a great deal of the fiction she had read the heroine always won her way with comparative ease, through sheer charm and native wit. But, somehow, charm and native wit did not seem to have much of a chance with the Company. The most elementary course in a Correspondence School would have gone further than the charm of a Madame de Sévigné. It was very disillusioning. And yet, in a queer sort of way, it was stimulating, too. A sense of being part of a mighty pageant that took up its march toward some uncomprehended goal at dawn and swept onward irresistibly until dark seized

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her very early in this first month. She felt the grim, vital, fascinating world of work reach out for her long before she had awakened in the mornings. She would sit up with a start, feeling for her watch. What if she had overslept! Six o'clock! a cold darkness in her room, the window just beginning to turn gray. She would lie back for a moment on her pillow with a half groan. How she hated the moment when she left her bed and lighted the dim yellow gas jet, revealing the dingy room, the battered bureau, her two trunks taking up most of the room, and the washstand, with a red-bordered towel tacked behind it, where she bathed, shivering and thinking of the warm and glistening bathroom she had always been accustomed to. How she hated and shrank from her surroundings in this hour!

And yet, curiously enough, mingled with the tingling of her cold bath, there always came to her that sense of being in a mighty current. When she left the small dairy lunch-room where she breakfasted on oatmeal and toast, this sense deepened, for now she found herself one of a tide of girls and young men

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that flowed west toward the great arteries of business, toward the elevated stations and the surface cars, bound downtown. They seemed to hurl themselves forward, their faces bent before the cold morning wind, in them a tense absorption, as if already their jobs claimed them. She joined this tide, and it enveloped her, pouring into her veins something electrical and alert. She learned to dodge through the traffic as lightly and deftly as the little shop girls and stenographers who clicked along on the high heels of their absurd shoes; and as she neared her own place of work she would wonder what was in store for her to-day, whether she would get through the day without a mistake, whether the boss would be in a good humor or in one of his dour spells, whether she could afford a hot lunch at the Y. W. C. A. or would have to manage with a sandwich at a soda fountain.

And as she had learned to make her way through the rush hour traffic, she was slowly learning the give and take of office life. She forgot that she was Anne Henderson, a young matron who had always been

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deferred to, and became an employee of the company, a very humble employee, strictly on her merits, pitched into that particular puddle to sink or swim.

She learned that a business organization is like a small community, the different groups interrelated, more or less interdependent. There were family jealousies, backbitings and recriminations between the different groups, which reached from the humblest foreman to the General Superintendent; there was a standing feud between Ricky and the stenographer of the treasurer; there were strained relations frequently between Dillon of the Purchasing Department and the Traffic Manager. There were days when the place was on edge with those difficult and touchy individuals, the Architects; when it boiled with aggrieved subcontractors, or vibrated with complacent superintendents from the various jobs, who were as full of their achievements as small sea captains home from a voyage. There were days when every one cowered before the boss's sudden fits of temper, or shivered before his cold disapproval, each one of them taking it out on the man underneath

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him. And then there were days when they expanded under his friendly jokes, when everything moved off with a cheerful snappiness, when they were all firmly convinced that they composed the most competent and going organization in New York.

At first she felt bewildered and strange in this humming world, but she had the adaptability of most American women. Little by little she forgot to think about herself and learned to think about the work in hand. She knew that she was there largely through Mr. Leavitt's good-nature. Her job was a sort of glorified office boy's work — filing, affixing postage stamps to correspondence, carrying packages to the express offices, looking up data in the public library for the boss, conveying plans and messages to the superintendents on the two or three city jobs that were under way. None of these things was important, and she sometimes felt a conviction of her own futility. And yet, never a day passed that she did not learn some detail that later was to be of use to her in a way she did not then foresee.

This sense of being a part of a job that was in

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turn a part of the world's work did not come all at once or quickly. It did not begin to come to her in fact, until after her first bad mistake. But perhaps the real beginning of it was due to Maggie's discharge. Maggie had exceeded the bounds of discretion once too often; had spoken impertinently to Charley Drierson and was out of a job before she quite knew what had happened. This happened after Anne had been under her galling yoke for a week. Charley Drierson, disgust written on his countenance, was about to telephone an agency for some one to take Maggie's place, when Ricky intervened.

"What you want to get another girl for, Mr. Drierson? Mrs. Henderson can do Maggie's work and her own too. If you show her a bit she'll be all right."

Charley Drierson scratched his stubby gray head and looked at Anne with extreme dubiety. Anne knew he was not at all flattering, but she waited meekly for his decision. She knew that with him as well as with the other men she was strictly on probation. They had for the first few days found it rather

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embarrassing to have Roger's wife working alongside them. All of them liked Roger, but the general, unspoken opinion was that he was a promising chap who had been somehow handicapped. The chances were it was Mrs. Roger's fault. They had gathered from some vague source of office gossip that she was extravagant. Some of them knew about the boss having given Roger and Lymon an opportunity to put some money in the organization, and they knew that Lymon had taken quick advantage of the chance while Roger had not. They knew that Roger played golf with friends of the boss, and they got it from Daisy the telephone girl — who had been there so long that she knew all about everybody from the number of children he had to where he ate his lunch — that Mrs. Henderson's name had appeared among the patronesses of a dance at the Biltmore. In consequence, with masculine logic, they resented Mrs. Henderson a bit. They were very polite to her when she appeared among them, but they gave her attempt at making a living about a week in which to collapse.

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Although Anne did not understand it, she was sensitive to this atmosphere of waiting to be shown. She was, therefore, pleased out of all proportion when Maggie's work was given to her and Charley Drier-son took her education in charge.

It was the best thing that could have happened to Anne. For Charley Drier-son knew the construction business from A to Z. It was his passion, his hobby, it was like his wife and friend to him. It was said of him that he left the office with reluctance at five-thirty and was waiting to get in when the janitor came to clean in the morning. It was incredible to him that any one should not feel the same interest in the minutest details of the organization that he felt; slovenliness of work was a sin, and a mistake was a crime. He undertook the training of Anne grimly — he did not hold much with women in business, he said. Ricky he had a certain amount of respect for, because Ricky knew her job. But Anne's abilities he profoundly mistrusted.

At first he frightened Anne out of her wits, then he roused her resentment, and finally her pride came

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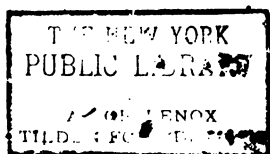
to her rescue. This happened after she had made her first serious mistake. She mailed an original detail instead of a revised detail to a subcontractor, and the mistake was not discovered until the man had wasted a hundred dollars' worth of work on his contract. He came boiling up to the office, and there followed a seething fifteen minutes during which every one sidestepped Charlie Drierson's wrath until there was no one left to blame but Anne. She learned in that fearful moment how it is of no avail in business merely to be a lady. After the first explosion Charlie Drierson came and leaned over her, struggling heavily to be patient while he explained exactly the sacrilege she had committed.

"You gotta *think*, Mrs. Henderson. You gotta take enough interest in every job we got on hand so that you keep track of the changes that are being made. You want to remember that every time the Owner and the Architect get together they change their minds — they got nothing else to do. That means a change in one of the full-sized details. Now, what you did was to file the revised F. S. D. and send



"YOU GOTTA THINK, MRS. HENDERSON . . ."

My Mother's House, C. 1910.



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out the old one. See?" He repeated this several times and rubbed it in.

"I couldn't make out the marks in the corner," said Anne, her lips quivering a little; "you said to send Flannigan a full-size detail, and I thought — I thought ——"

"Well, you didn't think hard enough," retorted Drierson, sarcastically. "See that mark? That means *revised*. Didn't you hear us all kicking around here last week about having to revise that ceiling detail? Didn't you know that the boys worked overtime to do it? Didn't you see the Architect up here sweating under the collar about it? Didn't you hear me swearing on the book I'd get it off Thursday? And yet you didn't take enough interest to see that Flannigan got the right detail after all the talking you'd heard about it."

"I — didn't notice," stammered Anne, faintly.

She was horribly afraid she was going to cry. Then, when she had conquered the lump in her throat she wanted to put on her hat and go out, never to come back again. But a voice within her said:

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“Roger went through all this, over and over — and he stuck.”

That noon she cut her lunch time to twenty minutes. She came back and put in the rest of the hour going through every detail she could lay her hands on about that particular contract — a big country house on Long Island. It was then that she began to get an idea of the business as a whole. Up to this time her understanding had been swamped in the vast number of small tasks that came under her observation; but now she seemed to catch hold of a thread that led her through the labyrinth from the first plan submitted to the final details. She had the normal woman's interest in house-building, but she had never had the slightest conception of what went into the building of a house. She knew now that besides the details she had seen, there were others — estimates, reams of correspondence, drawings, filed away. And this one house was but a small part of the business of the firm, which had built office buildings, factories, docks, theaters. For the estimates on much of this work Roger had been re-

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sponsible. For three years he had been the head of his department, the weight of that important unit had rested on his shoulders. There began to mingle with her thought of Roger a new and odd respect. It seemed incredible to her that she could ever have been so serenely unaware of what Roger was doing between the time he left her in the morning and his reappearance at six-thirty. For now these details were real things to her, things to have frightened dreams about at night, and to struggle with during the day.

"I don't know how I can ever keep it up," she thought.

But she went on, filing plans, sending out details, taking off long columns of unintelligible figures from blue prints, day after day. Only now she was waking up, she was beginning to see some connection between her special tasks and the work as a whole. Once she said to Charley Drierson that she would like to see one of the buildings, the plans for which she had handled day after day, in process of construction. Tremendously gratified, he took her

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across town to where a half-finished office building reared its steel skeleton. Steam riveters were rattating like machine guns, a hoisting engine was puffing away, masons were tapping cheerfully on the mounting courses of brick. A beatific light shone in Charley Drierson's face. He took her up and up as far as it was safe for a woman to go, and explained and expounded the minutest details of that building down to the foundation piers. Anne was fascinated. Seeing that she was genuinely interested he then took her a few blocks uptown to an old building they were making over into a modern apartment house, and with the same thoroughness he showed her what they were doing here. She was surprised to find herself thinking that this was what she would like to do if she were a man. To reclaim and reconstruct — this was something that awakened her imagination. She began to ask Drierson questions: Were there any books she could read on construction work? Would the technical magazines do her any good? How would he advise her to start in to learn some-

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thing about the practical side of reconstruction, for instance? . . .

But Charley Drierson backed away from the subject of book knowledge. He himself had learned the business from timekeeper up by hard experience. Routine office work was the only field he was willing to admit accessible to a woman. And when Anne talked with Ricky, Ricky gave it as her opinion that Mrs. Henderson would never make a stenographer or bookkeeper. Good office workers are caught young.

"If I'd only had some real training instead of a foolish finishing school!" Anne mourned. She and Ricky were having lunch together perched on two stools in front of a soda water fountain. It had taken some wooing to get Ricky to the point of going out to lunch with her, but Anne, hungry for talk with any one, had persisted, and had come finally to respect Ricky amazingly. "If I ever have a daughter," Anne went on, "she is going to be taught to make her own living. She'll appreciate her hus-

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band better, anyway, and she'll be able to make him appreciate her better too."

"You've said something," commented Ricky, her mouth full of marshmallow sundæ. "But there's no reason why you shouldn't advance, even if you haven't had training. There's outside work that always has to be done for the firm, you know."

"What do you mean by outside work?"

"Following up a prospect, talking with owners about new work. Tommy Greeley used to do that before he took Mr. Henderson's place. I've often thought that a woman could do that as well as a man. Of course, she'd have to know enough about construction work to talk intelligently. A couple of years ago I could have taken up that line myself, but I'm no good at meeting people. I like office work better. But you've got manners and you know how to talk — you could sell 'most anything if you got interested in it."

Anne thought a good deal about this little conversation with Ricky. As the summer advanced she had become more contented with her situation. She

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found that with her allowance and wages she could live a bit more comfortably and she had moved to a first-class boarding house farther uptown, where her room was very tiny but clean and comfortable, with a good reading lamp, a shelf for books and a bath she shared with another business woman. At first the evenings had been terribly lonely and depressing, but slowly she began to rediscover the world of books. She had always been fond of reading, but what with her friends, the house, the shops, bridge, dancing and the multitudinous nothings of her days, she had read very little except an occasional new novel and the "smart" magazines since her marriage. In the first year of their marriage she and Roger had read many books together, but they had let the habit lapse as their social lives became more complicated. Whenever they had a rare evening unoccupied, Roger buried himself in the papers and she pored over her magazines for a new entrée or a new story for the dinner she was giving next week. There were a number of books she had meant for years to read. She now hunted up her long disused card to the

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public library and fell into the habit of stopping in for a book on the way home from work. Most of them were novels interspersed with a popular book on the war; but latterly a technical book or two began to creep in. She was beginning to want to know something solid about this business at which she was earning a salary, at which Roger had earned one for so many years. She was not obliged to choose her technical diet altogether blindly, for among the men she became acquainted with in the drafting-room was one who differed from Charley Drierson in that he believed in book knowledge. He had had two years at a technology school, and had been obliged to stop for lack of funds. He had many of the qualities of the good student, and gave her from time to time the names of books carefully adapted to her lack of foundational training. Sometimes they bored her, especially at first. As she struggled with them she felt as if her brain were like a long unused muscle; it grew sore and weary and rebelled against the unusual demands put upon it. But slowly she found that she was beginning

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to enjoy some of them; they provided little paths of understanding through the forest of blue prints and specifications that had at first seemed to her a hopeless jungle.

But of definite aim in all this she had at first very little. She had instinctively reached out for something to save herself from loneliness and a sense of incompetency. She was still to a certain extent marking time merely. Her thoughts very often flew ahead to the time when Roger should come back and she should be once more established in her own home, with whole delicious days of semi-idleness before her. But as the time wore on she thought less about her future as Roger's wife and more about her present as a wage-earner in that organization of which she had become a part. Because, in spite of herself, she was becoming absorbed, she was beginning to feel the fascination of a world in which no one can stand still and survive. All about her, day by day, she heard the talk of men who were creating, intensely, avidly. She heard talk of the building of cantonments, hospitals, factories, she saw how men like

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Charley Drierson, even young Tommy Greeley, threw every ounce of themselves into the game, striving for something that was beyond salary. They were living, powerful factors in the growth of the world. There streamed from them something electrical that made the air tingle; she felt it long before she had reached the office in the mornings — it streamed from the crowds of young and middle-aged business men coming downtown in the subway, on the elevated; it reached out and touched her imagination; it touched her never awakened ambition, and slowly she began to envy these men who had the password, who were in the game, who had been trained from the time they could talk to shoulder their shares of the responsibilities of the world.

With envy there began to come to her the spirit of emulation; her pride awoke; she began to feel a dissatisfaction with being a mere mechanical earner of wages. This awakening of her pride was helped along by the letter she received from Roger in answer to the one in which she told him that she was working for the Leavitt Company. If she had writ-

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ten Roger that she had gone on the stage he could not have been more astonished. It was plain that he had never thought of his wife as a money-earning potentiality in his own line of work, and it was equally plain that he suspected the boss of giving her a job out of sheer goodness of heart. This amused Anne, but at the same time it stung her pride. She knew that she was earning every cent in her pay envelope, but it was undoubtedly true that she could be replaced at a moment's notice. She was beginning to feel that she should like to be valuable to the firm; she should like to be a thinking part of the organization.

Her first chance came, as chances are likely to come, in a very natural, unobtrusive way, in fact it was so much a part of the day's work that she might have missed it entirely had it not been for her conversation over lunch with Ricky. There was an old lady named Van Deusen, who had turned over to the Leavitt people some alterations she wanted made in her old house near Sheridan Square. They had drawn the plans and one day Charley Drierson sent

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Anne to Mrs. Van Deusen with a set of them. The old lady still clung to the family home, around which the tide of Italians, Greeks and Greenwich Village studios was rising. She also owned three other houses in the same neighborhood. The day Anne saw her she was just recovering from a frightful fit of temper because she had learned that the tenants were about to move from one of these houses unless she made certain expensive repairs.

"I'll see 'em in the ditch first!" she cried. She was quite a modern old lady in some ways and used vigorous language when aroused. "I'd give those houses away if I could find some one I hated bad enough, pesky things, costing me more than they bring in, rilin' me up about once a month."

It was then that Anne recalled what Ricky had said about creating new business. "Why don't you have them made over into modern studio apartments?" she asked. "This is the neighborhood for that class of building."

"Thought of that," replied Mrs. Van Deusen. "Had a man here once talkin' to me about it. We

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didn't get anywhere. I didn't like the way he pronounced *aëroplane*."

Anne remembered that Charley Drierson had said the old lady was a "nut," so she laughed and changed the subject by admiring a beautiful Spode teapot on a butterfly table.

"Give you some tea out of it," said the old lady abruptly. She rang. "Sarah, make some of that fussy toast of yours, and bring in the damson jam."

Anne knew that she had taken a step past the old lady's formidable portals. They had a very jolly little tea in front of a little clear fire and suddenly Mrs. Van Deusen stopped in the middle of relating how she had once been to the Winter Garden, and demanded to know what Anne really thought about making over those three houses of hers.

Anne did some quick thinking. "Mrs. Van Deusen, suppose you give me complete data concerning your present rentals, taxes, running expenses and repairs and let me figure it out for you approximately how you would stand on such a proposition?"

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"Don't mind doing that, but I don't commit myself, mind you!"

"Surely not! It's merely an idea of my own I'd like to work out, and I'll give you the benefit of it without any obligation on your side."

Anne half expected never to hear from Mrs. Van Deusen again, but in a few days the old lady sent for her to give her a statement from her lawyer which contained the facts Anne needed to go on with. She went straight to her friend, Charley Drierson, with them, explained the situation and asked him if he would go with her after office hours and look the houses over.

"I thought I'd like to get all my data in hand before I put it up to Mr. Leavitt," she added. "I may find it's not worth while."

"Oho! Doing something on the side?" he laughed.

"Well, don't you think I might?" she asked, a trifle defiantly.

"Sure! Go to it! Anything I can do to help you out I'm glad to do. We'll go down there to-morrow."

CHAPTER IX

THE inspection of the three Van Deusen houses took place next day after office hours, and it marked for Anne the beginning of the first sense of herself as a real factor in the business life of her employer. As she and Charley Drierson went over the three houses she examined them critically and eagerly, because they meant to her more than three old houses that were possibly to be reconstructed — they meant her first genuine chance. She listened to Charley Drierson's comments and made careful notes and sketches for her own benefit — the original plans of the houses they had already obtained after some difficulty.

She knew that without Drierson's aid she could have done little because of her lack of practical experience, and she let him see that she appreciated his interest. A building problem was meat and drink

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to him, but it was also something new in his experience to have a woman — and a charming one! — exhibit an interest in what was his whole life. He volunteered graciously to make an estimate for her on a tentative, rough set of plans they worked out together. By the end of two weeks she had plans and estimates in hand, and the idea was now ready to put before the boss.

She found that she had to conquer a sudden self-distrust when it came down actually to going into Mr. Leavitt's private office and saying: "I want to become something more than a clerk, and here is my justification!"

But, after hesitating the best part of the day, she finally took her courage in her hand — along with her sketches and estimates — and, finding out from Ricky when he was free, she walked into his office and plunged abruptly into what she had to say. After all, it was easier than she had thought it would be. The boss's eyes changed, as she went on, from a polite abstracted gaze to a keen expression of interest. The suggestion she put up to him was

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simple, so simple that she had been afraid from the first the ground had already been covered by some one else. It was that she should become a sort of digger-up of new business for the firm. She knew from Ricky and Drierson that this had been the function of Tommy Greeley, but she believed that she could give a new interpretation to the task.

"You think there are a good many owners lying around loose who would build or rebuild or make over if they were properly jogged up to do so?" Leavitt asked, smiling a little as he looked from the papers she had put before him to her intent face.

"Yes, that's the idea," she assented eagerly. "Like Mrs. Van Deusen, for instance. Her income from those three houses barely covers taxes and repairs, and yet she has slipped along from year to year for lack of some one to put before her concretely and persuasively a plan by which she could increase the value of her property and the income from it. It isn't that she hasn't the money to invest, either, for I've looked her up."

Leavitt smiled again. "You seem to have covered

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the ground pretty well. Drierson made these estimates, didn't he? "

" Yes, he was awfully good about it."

" Charley's a good chap, thorough and all that. If he had a little more imagination — well! in this case it was your imagination and his experience, eh? "

He studied the estimates a moment longer, then abruptly pushed them aside and rang for Ricky. " I'll see you again in a day or two, Mrs. Henderson," was all he said. Anne went out feeling rather rebuffed.

But after five that afternoon she went down to the Village and looked at Mrs. Van Deusen's houses again. She had begun to feel that they were her houses. She could see them reconstructed, with quaint fronts and window-boxes, the sort of thing that attracted the apartment-hunting woman. One of the basements, which had been a thorn in the flesh of Charley Drierson because he could do nothing with it in the way of profitable living quarters, she knew could be rented to a florist. She had a man

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in mind who had been advertising for weeks for a shop in that locality. She went to see him, found out approximately what he would pay and how long a lease he would sign. Then she went home, excited and hungry.

It seemed to her a long time before Leavitt sent for her. He had evidently gone into the matter somewhat carefully, for he had made a few changes in the rough plan and Drierson had revised his estimates.

"I think I'll let you try this out, Mrs. Henderson," he said. "On this basis you can try your persuasive powers on Mrs. Van Deusen. If you get her to the point where she definitely makes up her mind to rebuild, you can turn her over to me. But the thing is up to you, you understand, until that point is reached. I'm too busy to be bothered with it, and of course it is out of Drierson's line. If you land her, come back. If not — that's all there is to it."

She was shaking with excitement next day when she went to see old Mrs. Van Deusen. She had no idea what was the technique of "landing" a new con-

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tract, but she had a desperate feeling that she must do it, somehow. It seemed to her she had never wanted anything so much in her life as that contract. The old lady was in a bland and social mood; utterly ignoring the roll of blue prints in Anne's hand she poured tea from the Spode teapot and regaled her guest with a lively account of an auction sale she had been to the day before.

"I never buy anything," she said, "I only go because my daughters hate to have me. They want me to stay home and own up that I'm seventy."

"They'll want that more than ever when you begin to make over those houses on Charlton Street," Anne slipped in.

The old lady stared, and then chuckled. "Hadn't thought of that! It would make 'em nervous, wouldn't it?"

"Undoubtedly! Would you like to see what the houses are going to look like?"

Before the old lady could reply, Anne had spread out her plans with a drawing of the reconstructed front of the houses artfully on top. It was a pencil

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sketch done by a clever young chap Drierson had commandeered, and it showed the window boxes in full bloom underneath the quaint, small-paned windows.

“What’s this?”

“Why, your three old houses! This is the way they’ll look when we’ve finished with them.”

“Really! My word! Those old houses that always looked as if they’d had a Unitarian preacher for an architect! They look quite gay, don’t they?”

“Stunning! And here is the first floor. . . .”

When Anne went out two hours later into the wintry evening, she walked on air, for she had “landed” Mrs. Van Deusen. The old lady, completely enthralled by the blue-prints, had telephoned her lawyer in Anne’s presence for an appointment on the morrow, after which she was to see Mr. Leavitt and go into further details. Anne felt certain the work was going through. She had never been happier in her life before, happy with a consciousness of power, of resourcefulness. If this went through, she could go on; she knew there was a field

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for exactly the sort of thing she had in mind. Building on a large scale was practically at a standstill in New York on account of the priority of war orders and the scarcity of steel; but there was an increasing demand for apartment houses, very few having been built in over a year. The building operations she wanted to stimulate owners to undertake would require little steel, comparatively small capital, and they would tide over the slack period for the Leavitt Company. She could not have found a more propitious time to work out her new ideas.

As she ate her supper at her boarding house she thought of these points and in her mind began to make a list of neighborhoods for immediate survey. She wanted to write a long and excited letter to Roger; but on second thought she decided to wait until she could make absolutely sure of her first client — she was learning not to act on her first impulse!

It was several days before Leavitt sent for her, but when he did, he said as soon as she appeared in the door of his office: "Congratulations, Mrs.

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Henderson! We have the Van Deusen job, all right. You had the proposition so well worked out it didn't take us long to get it pinned down. What is your next proposal? "

"Two more old houses, very much like the Van Deusen ones. I've been looking at them for a week. If you like, I'll get the preliminary data about them."

He nodded. "Go ahead. And, by the way, tell Drierson to find another girl to help with the filing. That will give you more time. Suppose you have a desk put in Miss Rickman's room for yourself. You'll need a place to keep your reference files, the real estate periodicals, and all that. We'll work out a system for you, if we find it's going to be worth while."

Anne managed to get out of the room without showing how ridiculously pleased she was, but when she had reached Miss Rickman's room she closed the door, and to Ricky's astonishment she threw her arm around Ricky's shoulder and hugged her.

"I'm to have a desk of my very own," she chanted,

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"and a girl to help with the filing, and I'm to go ahead and try out my own ideas!"

Ricky's plain, clever face beamed with genuine delight. But she was practical to the core. "Did you ask for a raise?" she demanded.

Anne admitted that she hadn't thought of it. But in her envelope at the end of the week she found an increase — not large enough to turn her head, but quite large enough to make her feel like prancing. That night she wrote to Roger that the boss had raised her wages, but she did not tell him why. She wanted to feel her way first, to make sure she had got hold of something that was not merely a shallow vein.

About a month before this Emma and Henry had returned to town for the winter. Emma had immediately tried to persuade Anne to give up the boarding house and come to live with her. She also let Anne know that she considered her foolish and inconsiderate to keep on working when there was no real necessity for it.

"Henry doesn't like it at all," she said in her de-

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cided tones. "People will think he hasn't been willing to give you a home. Ada Kent looked very queer the other day when I told her you weren't with us."

"Considering that Ada let the summer and fall go by without looking me up, I don't think we need to consider her, do you?" Anne laughed. "I'm sorry to hurt Henry's feelings, but honestly I don't see how I can let his feelings interfere with my perfectly good job. You know, Emma, I have to face the fact that Roger may not come back. And if he doesn't, I can't live with Henry the rest of my life, can I?"

"You've changed, Anne," observed Emma, plaintively. "You are going to get hard and masculine, being in business. And what *is* the use?"

Anne looked at her sister, started to reply, and then it came to her that she could not make Emma understand. Emma had had first a father and then a husband to stand between her and the jolts of life; her whole existence had been carefully upholstered. She had never known anything of the terrors of exposure to the grimness of life, but neither had she

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ever known anything of the true elixir of the struggle. Anne realized for the first time how different her point of view had become in the last year. And she knew that in spite of loneliness and lack of the luxuries she had always considered essential to happiness, she would not trade places in the scheme of things with Emma. Neither did she want to hamper herself with Emma's rules of life. She explained, as tactfully as she could, that it was much better all around, for the time being at least, for her to remain as she was; her business hours would interfere with Emma's domestic routine, and she had no time for social excursions. Emma's face exhibited a droll mixture of relief and irritation. She knew perfectly well that Anne would be a grain of dust in her exquisite domestic machinery, going to business at eight in the morning and disagreeing with Henry at dinner; but at the same time she did want her little world to observe how patriotically she could take care of a soldier's wife. As a compromise she exacted a promise from Anne to spend at least her Sundays with them.

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It was at one of these Sunday dinners that Anne told Emma and Henry about her increase of wages. She took a certain mischievous delight in talking about her work to Henry, for Henry always looked pained when reminded that his sister-in-law was being paid, not a salary, but wages by a man who belonged to the same club as himself.

"Very nice," he said in his neat voice, gazing hard at the Sunday roast duck. "Very kind of your employer."

"Kind, nothing!" said Anne, rudely. "It's merely an acknowledgment that I'm making good at my job, and you're business man enough to know that perfectly well, Henry dear!"

"What does Roger think about your working for his company?" Emma interposed.

Anne laughed. "Poor old Roger! He seems to be a little like Henry — he thinks it is very kind of the firm to pay me wages. He never thought of the Leavitt Company as a charitable institution. You see, there's many a man who doesn't know his wife's possibilities." She shot a little smile at Henry.

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“But, of course, when he comes back you’ll give up this work,” remarked Emma. “It always seems to me so *unsuitable*, a married woman earning money when her husband is alive and able to support her.”

“Unsuitable perhaps if she has children. But what about the women like you and me and Ada Kent who haven’t any children? What share of the world’s work are we doing?”

Emma sniffed, and Henry averted his eyes as he always did when a conversation threatened to veer toward the undraped realities of existence. Anne laughed.

“Don’t worry! I suppose when Roger comes back I shall be glad to sag down on his poor old shoulders just as I’ve always done. But to-day I feel like having a career or something. You see, yesterday I landed about fifty thousand dollars’ worth of business for my firm, and to-morrow I’m going to be put on a commission basis. I may grow wealthy under your very eyes, Henry!”

She hid her exultation under a laughing tone, but she was immensely pleased with herself that day.

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For she had made another "killing" within three weeks after the Van Deusen contract and she sniffed a third in the same neighborhood. The commission basis had been Leavitt's own suggestion. She was to remain on her present salary, but under the new arrangement what she could make was limited only by her own initiative, energy and foresight.

That evening, when she reached the room she called home, she fell to thinking about Emma's question. When Roger came home would they settle back into their old way of life, scrambling along, straining to keep up with the procession of their extravagant friends, or would the experiences both of them had been through make a difference? Would she be satisfied to go back, now, to that semi-idle existence, which had seemed to her so busy and important? There were some features of that life she missed, the leisurely hours in beautiful shops, the two or three pretty frocks she always managed somehow to have, time to take exquisite care of herself, their dainty little dinners, the theater, afternoon tea at one of the gayest hotels. She missed these things, and yet not

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so much as she might have expected to miss them. For she had put something in the place of them that gave her a sense of satisfaction she had never known before. But Roger — how much did the sort of life they had led before he went away mean to him?

Turning off her light she went to the window where she stood staring down into the street. She was thinking about their married life, hers and Roger's. She had said to herself that Roger was satisfied with her, but behind this assurance was a vague uneasiness that had been with her for over a year. She thought of their one or two distressing quarrels, but she dismissed them — there were few husbands and wives that did not quarrel sometimes. What she could not dismiss was a remembrance of the change in Roger's attitude towards her — a change indefinable and evasive. She could not put her finger on it, but it was there, a growing indifference, a sort of taking for granted of their one time loverlike ways. There had been a brief return of a passionate tenderness between them just before Roger finally went away, but even in that mood there was also a kind of

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estrangement. It was as if Roger had been preoccupied with thoughts in which she had no part. In her heart of hearts she knew she could understand that preoccupation of Roger's now. She could understand it now as she could not possibly have done six months before. For she had had a glimpse into a man's world; she appreciated the intensity and the bitterness of the fight that is constantly going on there, and she could gauge the burden that is on the shoulders of every man who takes his responsibilities like a man.

"I was outside the real and important part of Roger's life," she thought. "Why should I have been? Was it my fault, or his? We had got so we never seemed to have anything to talk about. And yet, now, it seems as if we would have everything in the world to talk about . . . I think I could understand Roger better now. . . ."

It was as if she had begun slowly to make the acquaintance of her husband when she began to earn her living in the place and in much the same circumstances in which he had worked so long. She had a

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new and odd respect for him now. But what did he really think of her? She knew that she no longer merely wanted adoration, pliancy to all her wishes ; she wanted him to admire her, to respect her, to meet her on a new level of understanding.

CHAPTER X

CHRISTMAS came and passed and Anne plodded on, now and then having a brilliant piece of luck that brought her in touch with a fine new "prospect," now and then finding herself in a blind alley that led nowhere after she had worked patiently for days; now and then falling down for lack of experience, but picking herself up and making a note of her failure for future reference. She was learning all the time, and becoming more absorbed as she became more experienced. She was out in all sorts of weather, in a winter notable for vile weather, and yet she had never been so well in her life. She was deeply grateful for the work that kept her too busy to brood or worry, for she knew, not from Roger's letters, but from the papers, that in France there was terrible cause for anxiety. Roger wrote often, cheerful letters, full of descrip-

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tions of the American soldiers, what they talked about in the gun-pits and how they looked when they were cooking their supper in the mud of the trenches, lively descriptions of the building of roads and bridges, and of the old French couple where he was billeted early in the winter who marched two German prisoners off every morning to work on their farm. They were such casual, gossipy letters that it was difficult to visualize them, him, as a part of the hardships and horrors over there. And yet, sometimes, perhaps when she was walking along the street, or waiting in some one's office, suddenly her heart would stand still and a cold horror would sweep her as a realization that Roger might never come home came to her. That long terrible winter she was one of many thousands of women who watched the casualty list beginning to grow, who sometimes felt that theirs was the almost unbearable part of war. But if this was bad, how much worse off would she have been if she were idle, with time to brood, to indulge her imagination? The very fact that she had learned to stand on her own feet financially seemed to strengthen her

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spirit, to give her a fortitude she had never had in her life. And yet, she had never before thought so tenderly nor so deeply of her husband as she did now.

As if all this deep stream of new thoughts and new emotions that flowed underneath her working life was a preparation for what must almost inevitably happen, when the news finally came to her that Roger was wounded she met it with a spirit braced not to cry out. It came one afternoon just as the working day was over. Ricky was pinning on her hat in front of the tiny mirror over her desk — Anne for a long time after that winced when she saw Ricky like that, with a hatpin in her mouth and one hand tucking back her unruly hair — and the other girls had gone scurrying into the outer hall. Anne had just said:

“Ricky, I saw a hat in that little shop on the corner of Thirty-ninth that would look stunning on you — it had a dark green bird across the front — you could wear green —” when Mr. Leavitt came to the door of their room, paused on the threshold and then came in, closing the door after him. Both girls

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looked up, their faces setting, as if already they had a premonition that what he was about to say would bring terror into that quiet room. He held a telegram in his hand, and he said quietly:

"Mrs. Henderson, I am afraid I have news for you that will frighten you. Roger was wounded yesterday by a shell explosion in the town where he was billeted. But he cannot have been very badly hurt for he directed that the news should be sent you through me. The wire simply says that he was wounded and has been sent to a base hospital."

He put out his hand and took hers; he seemed to her so far away that his touch was a surprise and she looked down at his hand. She could feel Ricky's hand on her arm and she wondered why they pressed so close to her. She did not know that her face had turned perfectly white and the pupils of her eyes had dilated until they made her eyes appear black. There was at first one sentence darting back and forth across her mind: "It has come at last . . . *it has come* . . . I mustn't let them see how I feel . . ."

"I'm not going to faint," she said in a voice that

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sounded queer in her ears. "Please read the telegram slowly — I want to understand . . ."

Leavitt's car was waiting for him, and presently he took her uptown. Her immediate instinct had been to go home to Emma. She forgot in that moment everything except the fact that Emma was of her own flesh and blood; she wanted to be alone with her sister. And Emma received her with all her best qualities uppermost; she took her in charge capably and tenderly. She turned Henry out of his own room and installed Anne there so that she could be near her all night. They left the business of obtaining further details and verifications to Leavitt, knowing that whatever there was to be learned he could get. And then there remained nothing to do but wait.

All that interminable evening they sat near the telephone, and nothing came. At bedtime Emma forced her to undress and lie down in the bed next her own. It was towards midnight when Anne sat up with a start. "I thought the telephone was going to ring," she whispered. "I heard a click."

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"Lie down, dear. I'm sure Mr. Leavitt won't telephone to-night. It's so late now. But first thing in the morning Henry will get all the papers — there's sure to be something in them, or perhaps we'll have a message direct from Roger. You must try to sleep, to save your strength, Anne."

Anne lay down again, but she did not close her eyes, which were brilliant and glassy. Already some of the youth had gone out of her face. She tried to wrench her thoughts away from that moment when she had faced Leavitt and heard him say: "I'm afraid I have bad news for you, Mrs. Henderson!"

All her life seemed cut sharply into two parts by that announcement. Up to that instant she had been one woman, and after it she had become another. She felt as if she were detached from that old self, as if she stood off and looked at herself and at Roger, at their life together in something the way that God Himself must look at our lives. She looked back at their youthful love for each other, the love that had been so gay, and so little tender. It had been a com-

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pound of passion and carelessness, and on her part a bit of arrogance, the arrogance of the girl who is sure of the devotion of her mate. The city was new to her, life was as bright and new to them both as their wedding silver. She could see every detail of that first little apartment they had taken, before Roger had had his big increase of salary, before Emma had introduced her to Ada Kent and Ada had presented her to her friends — although she had not thought about it for four years. It was in that apartment that they had been the happiest; it was as if when they left it, the city had got them, it had pressed in on them, offering them everything but peace. They had had their first sharp difference of opinion over the furnishing of that apartment, but her ideas had won out, or rather her imitation of Ada Kent's ideas. . . . With a sigh of pain she turned on her side and her outflung hand touched Emma's and clung to it.

“You mustn't let yourself imagine things, dear,” Emma said. “Can't you get to sleep if you close your eyes and try?”

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"I keep seeing things when I close my eyes," Anne replied.

"Don't you think I'd better send for Dr. Bronson and have him give you something?"

"No, no, I don't want to be doped into not thinking," Anne cried. "There is something I am trying to figure out. . . ." She lay silent for a time, then she turned her face on her pillow and looked at Emma. "Emma, women like you and me and Ada Kent — I don't believe we ever really appreciate our husbands until we lose them."

"Why do you say that, Anne?"

"I mean that we take and take — and give back just as little as we can."

Emma stared, bewildered, but Anne did not appear to be aware of her. She went on talking, but it was not to Emma she talked so much as to some invisible woman who stood beyond Emma, whom she looked at and sized up slowly, gropingly, but remorselessly. There were long pauses between her sentences, pauses when she stared up at the ceiling where the light from

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the street lay in a golden oblong, and then looked back again as if at her invisible self.

“We talk about the idle rich, but it is the women like ourselves who have been the idlers — we who are neither poor nor rich. We waste ourselves, our time — we waste our men. The rich women — many of them work as hard as a man. There’s one I met. She owns a block of houses and she’s having them made over into model tenements, She’s on the Food Committee, in the Home Service, and I don’t know how many charitable organizations. She’s doing something to pay for being in the world. And the poor women — they pay, dreadfully, with children and work. And the women on farms — they pay, too. It is we — you and I and Ada — who get something for nothing. . . .”

“It sounds to me like nonsense! You know, perfectly well, how busy I am all the time — Ada, too!”

Anne went on as if she had not heard her. “We get out of everything we can — work with our hands or our brains — children — responsibility. We sag

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down on to the shoulders of Roger and Sam and Henry ——”

Emma's patience, born of her sympathy, gave way. “You know perfectly well, Anne, that Roger and Sam *like* business. All men do! It's their game. They'd rather play it than any other.”

Anne sat up, to look at her sister with eyes that appeared to have sunk a little in their sockets. “I know — but we make them play it too hard! We tie them to it, with our silly standards of living, until they don't have time for anything else but business in order to pay our bills. And so we become strangers to each other. . . . It all seems so futile — now — And we got nothing from it but show — no security, no inner peace, no real happiness. . . .”

Suddenly she sank back and buried her face in her hands. She felt as if she were drowning in a poignant and unappeasable sense of failure. It was unbearable, the thought that she might never walk beside Roger with her new understanding and sympathy, carrying her share of the burdens of their life.

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Emma looked at her sister, puzzled, vaguely affronted. "She's overwrought," she said to herself, to soothe a new uneasiness in her own soul. Then she too lay down, and presently she was asleep. But Anne lay staring at the pale golden oblong on the ceiling, while her thoughts went round and round the circle of cause and effect, sometimes slipping deep into the depths of pain and fear as she looked into the future, sometimes losing themselves in memories that had become all at once painfully sweet.

CHAPTER XI

IT had been in Roger's own office that she received the news that he was wounded, and as it happened it was in the same place and at the end of a working day that word was brought to her that he had been located and that his wounds were not considered serious. She had stayed at home with Emma for two days, waiting for news, and they had been, in their slow inaction, two of the most terrible days she had ever known. And then she had risen on the morning of the third day and told Emma that she was going back to work. Work had seemed to her the only thing that could keep her sane and give her a measure of relief. If Roger never came back, then she would have to go on anyway. A man in suspense and bereavement would have gone on working — why should not she?

It gave her a sense of warmth to see the kindness

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and sympathy in the eyes of Ricky and the men in the office when she came back. She knew they were grateful to her because she could go about her work steadily, for no matter what happened to the individual, the work of the world had to go on, and they, the workers, had long since learned this, although it was plain that they had not expected her to learn it so soon. And then, toward the end of the second day after she had gone back to work, Mr. Leavitt came in, triumphantly, an unusual and boyish smile on his face, waving a yellow slip of paper.

“They’ve sent word from Washington that Roger is getting on all right. They’ve located him in Base Hospital Number ——. He’s got some shell splinters in him and is suffering from shock, but he is out of danger!”

Anne never could remember afterward quite what she did in the tremendous relief of that moment. She knew that she and Ricky hugged each other frantically, and she was never sure that she hadn’t hugged Charley Drierson. There were ten minutes when every one in the offices stopped work and crowded

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about her, shaking her hand in embarrassed, shiny-eyed congratulation. She felt as if her heart were dissolving within her from the warmth, the pure joy of that moment.

“Nothing can ever be the same again,” she kept thinking. “How good they are, how human and sweet to me!”

Within a day or two there came a cable from Roger himself in answer to the innumerable ones she had sent. “Out of danger. Love,” was all it said, but she treasured it as she had not done any of his letters. She slept that night deeply, the sleep of exhaustion, for Roger was safe — for a time, at least! Two weeks later there came a short letter from him, evidently dictated to a nurse. He had had a pestiferous lot of metal picked out of him, but there was still an industrious bit dug in for the winter in his hip, he wrote. They would operate in a day or two when he had rested up a bit, and then he would be able to enjoy the clean bed and the other comforts with which he was surrounded. In the meantime, he felt a bit disgruntled, for that shell with his

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name and address on it had come along just in time to interrupt a regular day's work. He and a detachment from his company had been repairing a bridge on the main road to their village. The village had unexpectedly come under fire and the civilians had to be got over that bridge. They were all being sprinkled by the enemy battery, bridge-builders and civilians alike.

"One end of that bridge," he wrote, "looked like the entrance to the Ark, after Noah had sent out his invitations. There were humans and rabbits, cows, two horses so old they had beards, crates of chickens, dogs, the family cat and a goat, all mixed up with bundles of bedding as big as haystacks, and all waiting to get across. I saw all this and thought how funny it was even as I jumped here and there. And then, just as the last plank was down and I ran back to start the menagerie across — whine — whizz — plink! and the next thing I knew a red-haired doctor was saying: "Breath deep — darn you, breath deeper!" And here I am, out of it. Rotten luck! No, I ought not to say that. For Snubby — tell the

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fellows at the office — poor little old Snubby has got his, I hear. Blind — but decorated by his French commander for gallantry. I haven't heard the details. Well, his is the glory — no use pitying him. . . . Love, so much, my dear. And write often. . . .”

That was all he had to say about the occasion that brought him his wound stripes and a first lieutenancy. Anne saw the announcement of his promotion in the paper, and her heart swelled with pride. She swaggered shamelessly before Henry and Emma that Sunday at dinner. And a letter from Roger received on the same day said he was sitting up and eating everything in sight.

It was therefore out of a blue sky that she received a cablegram saying he was coming home, sailing date unknown. In the midst of her excitement and pleasure over this news she felt the chill of a premonition; could it be that Roger was not getting along so well as he had given her to understand?

Fortunately she had little time to worry, for as soon as she received this last cable she decided that

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she must have a home for Roger to come to, the boarding-house being out of the question. The chances were that he was ill, that he was going to need long nursing. She felt every nerve and faculty leap to meet this emergency.

If all this had happened before her various wage-earning experiences, her impulse at this juncture would have been to consult with Emma and Ada Kent, a move that would have resulted in her leasing an apartment very much like the one she had given up when Roger went away. But for the best part of a year she had done without Emma or Ada Kent; she had also done without several luxuries she had always considered essentials, and she had learned the value of a dollar hardly earned. She did not know whether Roger would be continued at his present pay, whether he was to be discharged from the army, or what his needs would be. She decided therefore to figure their expenses on the basis of her present salary and commissions, plus the allotment she had been receiving. If there was to be no allotment, at

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least there would be insurance. She felt safe in taking an apartment.

But it was not in the neighborhood nor on the scale of their former home. After a week spent in a determined hunt during every hour she could squeeze from the office, she leased the ground floor in an old house of charmingly proportioned rooms. If Roger was lame, he could not climb stairs; and an elevator apartment that was large enough would be too expensive. The neighborhood was just slightly out at elbows; it was the sort of neighborhood to make Ada Kent exclaim: "My dear, she is living in the most *impossible* neighborhood!" But it was quiet, it was within a block of the subway, and the rooms were all light. Also the rent was little more than half what they had paid farther uptown in their huge cliff dwelling on Riverside Drive.

For two weeks she indulged in the favorite feminine sport of choosing wall paper, overseeing the scrubbing, polishing and decking of her new home, getting her household things out of storage, lingering with a happy, critical eye over each article, arranging and

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rearranging them, unpacking trunks and chests.

She had to do all of these things out of office hours. She went to bed late and was up betimes, but she felt as sustained as if she had drunk some elixir whose property was to give one lightness and strength. For Roger was coming home! He was perhaps at that moment on the way. She wanted to have everything ready, down to the last clean towel in the little bathroom, the bowl of yellow flowers on the mantel in the living room. One evening Ricky came home with her, at her invitation. The furniture had been sent home from storage and in the large front room most of it was in place. The deep down-cushioned sofa flanked the old-fashioned fireplace on one side, and Roger's favorite chair with the reading lamp stood at the other. The lady-by-the-day who had been cleaning for Anne had just laid down one of Anne's wedding presents, a deep-blue Chinese rug. Ricky drew a deep breath.

"My, how stunning this room is!" she exclaimed. "You've got such a lot of pretty things!"

Anne looked around at her in some surprise — she

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had just been thinking that the dining room was far too small for their dining-room things. But at sight of Ricky's admiring face she thought: "It's all in the point of view!" And she sat down with a contented sigh, aware all at once that the old room, with its high ceiling and generous proportions, was beautifully homelike.

"Look here, Ricky, you must come and see me often when I get settled, will you?" she cried. "Would you put this little orange and blue rug here — or here in front of this chair?"

She was wondering how she could ever have felt discontented with her possessions; they all seemed to her now infinitely satisfying, like gracious friends from whom she had been away for a long, bleak time. Her heart sang a little grateful song.

She need not have made such haste with her preparations, for it was fully a month later, in March, before Roger came home, in a transport full of sick and wounded. And even then she could not have him at home, for there was to be a short detention period in one of the government hospitals before

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even his wife could take possession of him. But she was allowed to see him soon after he landed, at the hospital to which he had been assigned.

Trembling with a queer kind of dread she was ushered into his room. He lifted his head from the pillow. It seemed to her there was nothing left of him but his smile, the same, quick, boyish smile that always came to his lips when he was pleased. His eyes, which had changed so oddly, devoured her. But after one glance at him she could not bear to look again for several minutes: he must have been through not only physical pain, but pain of the soul and mind to look like that.

She was allowed to stay only a brief quarter of an hour. The voyage had tried him severely; he dropped asleep even as they were talking. The doctor told her later that the operation on the hip had been more complicated than they had expected, and foreseeing a long convalescence they had thought it best to send him home. He was also still suffering somewhat from shock. But altogether, his condition was what the doctor called "favorable."

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“Will he — will he be able to go back?” she asked, feeling her heart rising to choke her as she put the question.

The doctor shook his head. “Can’t say. Probably not for months, anyway. But if I were you I wouldn’t tell him that just yet. He wants to go back — most of them do, you know.”

During the next few weeks she visited the hospital as often as possible. At first there was often an expression in Roger’s eyes that puzzled her a good deal until she understood it better. She saw it in the eyes of more than one man — a queer, childlike bewilderment that had an edge of terror. She would see it in Roger’s eyes when he awakened from one of his light sleeps, and it wrung her heart until she accepted it as a usual symptom.

“Nine-tenths of the shock cases have it,” the doctor told her. “It will wear off. Keep him cheerful. Get him to look forward if you can.”

During these first two weeks he seemed rather apathetic, now and then petulant and inclined to feel himself aggrieved if she was five minutes late. But

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for the most part he appeared content to lie or sit quietly, looking at her as she read to him. Then slowly he began to find himself as the days passed. She could almost see the stages by which he came back into touch with his old life again. He was like a person who has been in another world where the events that had happened were so absorbing, so strange, that they dwarfed anything that might occur in this one. It was only by making a visible effort that he could concentrate on details of his old life that had once seemed of the utmost importance. Anne had a feeling that he was forcing himself to take up one by one the threads of their lives. About this time Charley Drierson paid him a visit to give him the gossip of the office. The next time Anne saw her faithful friend he smiled at her as if something amused him.

“ Roger don’t just take to the idea of your working with us, does he? ” he said to her.

“ Did Roger say so? ” she asked quickly. She had been putting off the day of practical discussions.

“ Not in so many words, but he sort of apologized

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for you — said it was fine of the boss to give you something temporarily to keep your mind off worrying, and so forth. But, of course, you never having had any experience, weren't much use to us!"

"And what did you tell him?"

Drierson chuckled. "I asked him if he thought the boss was running a charitable institution. I told him you'd had one raise of salary, and you'd struck out a nice little line for yourself. Then I come away to let that sink in."

Anne sighed unconsciously. Readjustment was going to come hard to Roger and to many like him. They had come back to find a new order, but most difficult of all was the change within themselves. They had looked on the faces of splendor and of horror — they were going to find it not easy to come back to the drafting-boards, the ledgers, the shops — and the competition of women.

One day when Roger was able to take a short turn on the hospital verandas he said suddenly: "Anne, I don't see how we're going to make it go on my pay. I did a little figuring yesterday and as far as I can

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see what I draw from the Government falls considerably short of what it used to cost us to live. And everything is higher, now, anyway. Of course, if I can't go back to active service, Leavitt wants me back at the old salary. But the doctor says I can't go back to full time for maybe four months yet. And in the meantime, I'm neither a soldier nor a civilian. The way I figure it out, if you would go to live with Emma for the summer in the country and let me start out in bachelor diggings again, we can save a little money and get on our feet by autmun. I know you won't want to live with Emma, but after all, Henry was awfully decent when he was up here the other day ——"

"Wait a minute, dear," said Anne quickly. She was glad that at last Roger himself was ready to talk about their future. "In your calculations you didn't figure on my salary — and commissions — did you?"

"Of course not!" His tone was rather stiff. "You needn't think I want you to go on working when I am able to. And summer coming on, too!"

Anne laid that phase of the subject away for fu-

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ture discussion. "And there was another mistake you made," she said serenely. "You figured on our old basis of living, didn't you? I've learned a thing or two since you went away, and I know we can live comfortably on much less than we used to live on. Take our new apartment — it costs about half what we used to pay. And I've found a maid who will come to me by the day for about two-thirds of what I paid Susie. Of course, she isn't an expert — I'll have to teach her — but why shouldn't I teach her? And as for clothes — you have your uniforms and I don't need much in the office —" she remembered here that they hadn't settled about the office, yet, and she hastily changed to — "anyway, summer clothes don't cost much. And there's another thing you didn't count on: there's half your allotment money in the bank."

"In the bank! But — but what have you been living on?"

"Why, you dear old silly — on my salary, of course!"

She gave her head a gay, proud little cock and

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looked at him, aware that this instant was important, that it marked the beginning of a new element in their relationship. She saw the surprise and incredulity in his eyes change to a puzzled keenness of contemplation. She felt that just to see that expression in his eyes was worth everything she had gone through.

"Look here," he cried, "you'd better tell me how you managed it. You've mentioned commissions before, too — you'd better come across with the whole story before I send for Charley Drierson and make him explain. And I guess I'm strong enough now to hear about your business venture with that Beal girl. You've never been very clear about that, you know."

"Very well," said Anne, "I'll tell you the story of my life!"

She was laughing, but her mind was working rapidly. How much of that stupid early venture of hers should she relate? How much would a man tell his wife in the same circumstances?

"Just as much as he thinks is good for her," she reflected; and determined to follow this rule.

CHAPTER XII

THERE was no denying that Roger was a rather captious convalescent. Like most masculine invalids he could think of more things he would like to have done for him than two trained nurses could have kept up with. Fortunately, Leavitt offered Anne a two weeks' vacation in which to get Roger settled at home. This time always stood out in her memory as a queer mixture of tender happiness and a kind of growing dismay. It was for both of them a sort of second honeymoon, in which there was delight in being together and at the same time a kind of estrangement, as if each had a secret, absorbing, and not yet to be shared with the other. But Roger's home-coming was a day of pure happiness. He was so glad to get home, so touchingly delighted to see and feel the familiar household gods around him (Anne was relieved to see that he had

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not yet missed the Sheraton sideboard) that they were both like childdren. It happened to be an unseasonably cold evening and Anne had laid a fire in the old-fashioned fireplace. Roger lay back in his comfortable chair with cigarettes at his elbow and his familiar worn slippers on his feet, and watched Anne as she moved in and out of the room, giving Julia a few last instructions about their dinner. Suddenly as she passed his chair he put up a hand and drew her face down to his.

“You look so sweet, Anne,” he murmured.

She pressed his head against her breast. “Do you like these rooms, Roger? Don’t you think we shall be just as happy here as if it were a larger apartment up where we used to live?”

“Dead sure of it, dear. Only, I want you to have things the way you like them ——”

“Don’t worry about me! I’m going to be so busy there won’t be any time to miss our marble halls. And I’m not sure these old houses aren’t more homey than all the brand-new apartment houses put together.”

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"You're right there! I always did hate a string of lazy hall-boys! What does Emma think of this place?"

Anne laughed. "Emma says it's all right for artists and Bohemians who live in a haphazard way, but not for us because we have a standard to keep up!"

Roger growled under his breath in a way that pleased her because it sounded like the old Roger. But he was too happy that evening to waste his breath on Emma and her standards. He wanted only to sit there and drink in the fact that he was at home again.

But after the first few days at home there was no ignoring the fact that Roger was not quite happy. Anne, watching him, knew this and believed she understood the cause. They had told him at the hospital the day before he left that in all probability he would be a little lame for some time, enough to preclude the possibility of active service. He felt as if he was stranded high and dry above the rushing currents of life. He had had a taste of an experi-

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ence that drew him like a powerful magnet, an experience that had aroused in him deeper thoughts and emotions than any he had ever known. He wanted to go on, to accomplish something, to win promotion, to feel that he had finished what he set out to do when he enlisted. There was in him no uncertainty now as to his motives in enlisting: he wanted fiercely to win out over an enemy he had come to hate through what he had seen and heard. And then, just at the climax, to be plucked out of it all by the neck, as he said; to be put out of the most tremendous thing in the world because of a few steel splinters! An exasperating feature of the whole circumstance was that he was neither soldier nor civilian in point of practice, for he had, of course, not received his discharge, although he had been given permission to take up his former position again until he was re-assigned. He felt as if he had been jolted out of one rut and had not yet settled into another. He was also not yet quite up to par physically, and he was therefore less able to cope with his depression.

Anne, studying him, realized that for Roger, per-

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haps for them both, a period of reconstruction had begun. She thought about it a good deal, but talked of her thoughts very little, for she was feeling her way. She wanted these two weeks to be happy ones; they were the first free weeks she had had in a year, and she was feeling, herself, the reaction from the long strain. So she and Roger sat out in the spring sunshine in the parks, walking a little, reading aloud sometimes, but very often sitting in long silences, silences that were not quite companionable, because neither was quite certain what the other was thinking. Then one evening, toward the end of her two weeks' leave of absence, Anne said, trying to speak casually and carelessly:

“Only two days more. Oh, I have enjoyed this vacation!”

They had come out into the rather sooty little garden, on to which the door of the dining room opened, and Roger was smoking in a long deck chair. He looked around at her, puzzled.

“Two days more — what do you mean?”

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"Two days more of my vacation. I promised to be back on Monday."

When she had said this she clasped her hands behind her head and looked up at the evening sky. She was aware in that instant, while she waited for Roger to reply, that she was ready to defend her intention to the limit. She wanted to go back to work — she had missed the excitement of the game!

Roger did not at once reply. He very carefully knocked the ashes from his cigarette, and sat there holding it in his hand contemplating it. Finally he said quietly: "I thought we had settled that you were not to go back to the office."

She smiled and wanted to retort that Roger was the one who had settled it, but she knew that this should be the most tactful moment of all their critical moments. So she imitated his quiet tone. "Don't you want me to go back, Roger?"

"Can't say I do!"

"Why?"

"Well —" a long pause while he brooded over the

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cigarette. "Isn't it a pretty bad reflection on me, Anne, if you have to work for wages?"

She looked around at him, smiling so as to take the edge off her next remark: "Then it's a matter of personal vanity, isn't it, Roger?"

"Why, no, not altogether! Hang it all, Anne, an able-bodied man doesn't like to see his wife go out every day to work for another man! Other chaps see her doing it and they jump to the conclusion a man's a failure. It makes a man feel small!"

A year earlier Anne would have accepted this with some complacence as somehow a tribute to her femininity. But she had learned to think a little clearer; also there were certain things she remembered. She leaned forward, clasping her hands above her knees, frowning a little, trying to marshal her arguments.

"Roger, that argument of yours against a married woman's working outside her home may have passed muster a year ago, but it doesn't sound so reasonable now. You have to remember that, while you've been over there in France, things have been moving fast here, too. Thousands of wives have dis-

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covered they can make money, earn wages, and it has changed their viewpoint a lot. Well, don't you see, the husbands' viewpoint will have to change, too? They will have to get rid of the idea that it's a disgrace to them not to keep their wives at home, idle half the time. Of course, if there are children, then it's different. They've got their job all cut out for them, then. But when there aren't any children, or the children are in school or grown up — why shouldn't a woman have a money-earning job? — if she likes it!"

"Do you like it, Anne?" He asked the question with a simple astonishment.

"I think," she said slowly, "I think I must, for I want to go back. I feel as if I had begun something that I want to complete. I should like to make good. They've given me a chance, and I can see that I've only just begun to take advantage of it. There's a kind of *alive* feeling I have, now, that I don't remember ever having before." She spoke slowly, choosing her words, feeling her way through the new thoughts that were stirring in her mind.

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“When I was working, especially at first, I often disliked it; I felt as if I would like to stay at home and fuss around, doing all the little things that a woman does when she has the whole morning before her. I missed having tea, and shopping, and playing bridge, of course. And I thought that when you came back and we were settled in our own home again, I would take up things where I left off. But these last two weeks there have been things I’ve missed more. Don’t think it hasn’t been wonderful and sweet to have you back again, dear —” she put her hand over his — “for it has been in some ways the very happiest two weeks of my life. But we’ve got to be honest, haven’t we? And I would be lying if I said I haven’t missed something I get, every day, out of my work. It’s a kind of burnishing up of my brain to come into contact with men like Mr. Leavitt, and Charley Drierson. But it’s something more than that, too — it’s hard to put into words — but it’s something I get in my pay envelope along with the money, something the money is just a symbol of — I don’t know whether it’s independence, or a sense

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of being a valuable part of the machinery of the world, or what — but it is there — and I miss it.”

Roger did not answer. He lay back, motionless in his chair, staring at nothing. She got from him a sense that he was profoundly astonished, probably a little hurt; but he was thinking about what she had said as he had never thought about any remarks of hers before. His silence frightened her a little; suddenly what she had said sounded hard and unloving, as if she did not appreciate the great fact that he had come home, that he was safe. She put out her hand again and touched his arm.

“Roger —” she began, but he interrupted her.

“How would it be if I had plenty of money? Would you still want to be in business? Would you still feel the way you just said ——”

“If we were rich it would be absurd for me to be in business, of course. But I can see that there are things I should like to do. It’s going to be a great world for women, Roger. If I had leisure and money I should want to take part in the life of the city and the nation, not just the society life, but the big life

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that is made up of better laws, better education, better institutions. I know I sound vague, but I've only just begun to think about it. Don't you see, what I mean is that all that old life of wasting money and wasting time on things that don't really help in a crisis is past for a woman when she begins to think. Idleness and extravagance — the fun is gone out of them, Roger. Because there's something else that is so much more fun. . . . Do you see at all what I mean, dear? "

"Um-m — in a way," he muttered, and then another long silence.

"He isn't sure whether he likes me this way," she thought. And she felt a little sad, as if she were leaving him behind. She had a taste in that instant of the inherent loneliness of souls. But she knew from his face he, too, was wrestling with new problems, a new point of view. She had an impulse, which was purely womanly, to cry out to him: "Forget what I've said, and let's be happy. If it makes you love me more to go on in the old way, let's go on that way!" But something deeper than sex in-

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stinct even, or if not deeper, clearer-eyed — said to her: “The time has come to look at your mutual life from the standpoint of two rational human beings, not from the standpoint of sex privilege or sex rights. You’re talking now, shoulder to shoulder, eye to eye — don’t spoil it by concessions to something that is outworn, finished with. . . .”

“I don’t know what’s going to become of the homes, if all the women in the world take your attitude, Anne!” he said after awhile.

“I don’t think anything will ever happen to homes, because I believe the average woman loves home better than the average man does. I don’t believe she’s ever going to let home slip out of her hands. But maybe she’s going to change the ideal of home. . . .”

She came to a pause, thinking this over. And after giving her a moment or two he demanded what was her ideal of a home.

“I think it’s something that two human beings, working together, have made,” she replied, slowly. “Two human beings working in equality and under-

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standing. Something they've made for their future and the future of their children and the future of the world. Something they're equally responsible for and love equally. It's not just a place that a man comes home at night to, where he can eat and sleep comfortably. Not just a place that costs him more than he can rightly afford, out of which he gets just a certain bodily comfort. And not just a place where a woman goes round and round in a circle of daily tasks, or where she idles or is busy in a futile kind of way. . . . I know I sound like propaganda of some kind, but I'm trying to think out this thing and get at what has been wrong with it in most cases. . . . After all, it comes down to the woman. Life is harder for a woman who wants to be an all-round human being, than it is for a man. Life puts a choice up to her — and either way she loses out. If she chooses the great part — to be a wife and mother — life makes the part so absorbing that, unless she's a tremendous woman, she can't be anything else. And if she is nothing but a wife and mother — well, no one can blame a man for not

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finding her one function very interesting! And when her children grow up and no longer need her, then she loses her principal job. Unless she has kept herself in contact with the world she is just a sort of pensioner. I can't see but what she loses out in a certain way, except for the consolation of knowing that she's done her duty. . . . And if she chooses a career instead — then she loses, too. She loses even more by this choice than by the other. . . .”

Roger gave a short laugh. “You're making women out to be the abused half of humanity!”

“No, no! They're not abused — maybe they're blessed! Because, after all, once their complications are solved, they're going to get more sheer wonder out of life than any man! Why, think how glorious it would be to say, when life offered you a choice of two things: ‘I'll take both!’ And why shouldn't one take both? Why can't a woman — material circumstances being favorable — be a child-bearer and home-founder and have a career, too? I believe it's going to be a matter of coöperation be-

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between men and women, a matter of women's growing intelligent enough to refuse to lose out, intelligent enough to make use of the world's resources, intelligent enough to board time like a miser!"

Anne stopped with a laugh, out of breath. "Aren't I preaching, though!"

"It all comes down to this: you think you'll find life more exciting if you are working outside your home?"

Anne sighed. "If you want to put it that way — yes! Are you going to mind, very much, Roger?"

"I don't know that I should mind so very much, if I could see any really good reason for it — a reason that didn't have anything to do with all this new feminism. Come on, now, do you know of one?"

Anne leaned forward in her chair, her chin in her hands. The little garden, hemmed in by old brick houses, in which here and there a light was beginning to shine out, was very quiet. The evening sky was turning a deep and tranquil blue above them.

"Do you remember once telling me a long time

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ago, Roger, that you considered I had fallen down on my job as a wife? ”

He moved with a mixture of uneasiness and impatience. “ I don’t know as I ever said that, Anne! ”

But she knew that he probably remembered the words and the occasion as well as she did, and she went on: “ That was what you said, and I think you meant it. I had fallen down, and I know it, now. At the time I was merely angry, but since then, in the past year, I’ve thought about it. I’ve figured out why you felt that way. I wasn’t holding up my end of the job. Since I’ve had a certain amount of experience I’ve come to the conclusion that you were doing your part all right. I know, now, how hard you were working. But, you see, dear, you started in on the assumption that I was a more or less ornamental part of your life, and then you were not very logical when I accepted the rôle. The one concrete thing that started us on the discussion that day when you said I had fallen down was the fact that you hadn’t been able to save enough money to make an investment that would help your

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future. At the time, I thought you were unjust to me; but since then I've learned to appreciate the value of a margin. That's one reason I want to go on with what I've begun. We can live, I know, as we are if I don't earn a cent, but we'll be able to save only a little, and you'll have to work just as hard as you did before. It will mean that if a chance should come along for you to go into business for yourself or to make a good investment, you won't be able to make the best of it. You will be tied up just as you were before. You'll be going round and round in the squirrel cage just the same as you have done since we were married. Since I've seen more of men in business I've realized how handicapped they are when it's all going out and nothing staying in the bank, and I don't want it to be that way with you. And so — there's my reason that has nothing to do with the new feminism! As I'm well and strong and making a home doesn't use up half my time and strength, why shouldn't I be in business?"

"But you'll tire yourself out! Summer is com-

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ing on — you don't know what it is to work through the hot weather in New York!"

"Oh, don't I!" she smiled. "Roger, honestly now, have you ever known me to look so well as I do now?"

He admitted that she did appear unusually fit, admitted it absent-mindedly, and then another long silence ensued. The twilight deepened and Anne rose with a shiver. "You must come in, or you'll get cold," feeling all at once a drop in her spirits. After all, did he understand what she had been trying to get at — did she herself?

But as she turned away he put out a hand and caught hers. "Anne, you're *all right!*" That was all he said, but she knew he meant a great deal more. He held her hand close against him and she stood looking down at him in silence. It seemed to her that from a long distance apart they had come closer together than they had ever been in their life. There was something rather grave, but altogether sweet, about this silence. She did not want to have it

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broken and she stood still, her free hand lightly stroking his hair.

"You've changed a good deal in the last year, Anne, but you — but you're all right!"

"The whole world has changed a good deal, Roger."

"Yes, it's the beginning of a lot of new thoughts."

"And you and I — it's as if we were beginning over again. We've been shaken out of the old rut, both of us, and we're making a new, fresh start. Let's shake off the old ideas and start right!"

He stood up with a laugh. "You mean, let's start *your way*!" But now he held her hand pressed close between his. They might have been lovers standing there in the twilight.

"All right, we'll try your way, Anne — but I'm only doing it because you're such a darned good sport, dear old girl!"

She knew that as long as she lived she would never hear anything said about herself that would make her so happy.

CHAPTER XIII

WHEN Anne had said that life is a complicated thing for the woman who chooses both a home and a business occupation she did not know to the full how complicated it could be. There were a few weeks before Roger himself came back to the office and took up his former work. And in these weeks Anne, going on with her job, came to appreciate what it must mean to a man to have a discontented wife at home. Not that Roger exactly acted the rôle of a discontented wife, but he chafed visibly under the reversal of their positions.

“If you’re going to leave me every day,” he would say, half laughingly, half grimly, “I wish you’d tell that colored Juno not to sing. And tell her not to give me carrots again for my lunch.”

“Poor dear! I told her and she forgot. I’ll write it down.”

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"It seems to me that if you leave the office at five you ought to get home at half-past."

"But, Roger, I have to do the marketing on the way home."

"Oh, all right! Only it seems an infernal long day, somehow."

And he wondered why she laughed, and kissed the top of his head with a cryptic smile. She was thinking of the women who saved up all their troubles to pour out upon their husbands when they came home at night.

It seemed to her then that Roger would be all right once he himself was at work again.

But one day, when Roger had been back at his post in the estimating department for a month, the boss sent for her to come into his private office. He said he wanted to have a frank talk with her about Roger.

"I've been watching Roger since he came back," he said, "and it strikes me he isn't quite contented. I've got a theory about the boys who have been in the army that they'll either take up their old jobs

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and make a great deal better at them than before they went away, or else they'll find the job doesn't fit them at all when they come back. Which way do you think it is going to be with Roger?"

"I think it's a little early to say, yet," she countered. "But I have a theory myself. I think that Roger's military training and the responsibility he took, the initiative he had to develop, have made it rather hard for him to come back to just figures. He has lived out of doors, he's had men under him, he's had to plan and think for himself and for them. Perhaps, now, he ——"

"Perhaps now he's outgrown his job," Leavitt said as she hesitated. "That's my theory of the situation, too. On the strength of that theory I've made a tentative plan, and I thought I'd ask you what you thought of it before I submitted it to Roger. This line you're working on has grown surprisingly, and I believe it could expand even more if we made a regular department out of it — a sort of reconstruction department. My idea is to give that department to Roger and you, let you two shape

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it up and make the biggest thing you can out of it just now while other private construction work is light. What do you think of that idea? ”

A wave of color swept over her face from astonishment and pleasure. But then a second thought came to her. “ Would it be better for Roger to have the department alone? I mean, is there work enough for two? Because if there isn't I'd rather Roger had it.”

Leavitt smiled at her gravely and understandingly. “ It's nice of you to say that, but I don't know that I would have suggested it if I hadn't believed there is room for two in that line. You are in a way the pioneer of the idea and you are working it up well. I believe a clever woman who really believes in what she has to sell has a gift of persuasion that most men lack. Also you're developing a nose for neighborhoods and their possibilities. My theory is that Roger's expert knowledge, supplemented by your natural gifts, ought to make a fine working combination. Anyway, I'm strong for try-

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ing it out. But don't say anything to Roger, please, until I've seen him."

Anne was immensely elated. She had an interview with the owner of a house she wanted to rebuild and she got home half an hour later than Roger. She found him waiting for her, and knew the instant she looked at him — as a wife always knows! — that something had happened that had awakened his interest.

"Leavitt has put up a proposition to me," he began at once, "that sounds interesting. It is to make your old-houses scheme into a regular department and work it up for all there is in it."

"Oh!" she said brightly, "that does sound interesting!" Evidently the diplomatic boss had not told Roger that he had already talked with his wife. "What is his plan?"

She turned around, unpinning her hat, and looked at him, while something within her seemed to hold its breath. For she knew that they had come down to a test. What attitude was Roger going to take toward this suggested combination? He had never

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said very much about what she was doing; his attitude was one of suspended judgment. But she knew that now she was half-afraid of his next words. For if he was going to prove himself small or ungenerous toward her, now was the time. She stood there very quiet, watching every shade of expression in his face. And then, as if he caught from her silence, or from her face some hint of her suspense, he suddenly threw an arm around her and gave her a tremendous embrace.

"The boss certainly handed it to you, Anne!" he cried. "I was darned proud of you."

"Oh, Roger!" she caught her breath. "Really? Really?"

"Yes, I was — and I am! He wants you and me to take that line and work it up together. Get that? Together!"

"Roger! Would you like that?"

"Sure!" He spoke with the large coolness of the male who conceals his enthusiasms. "In some ways it's the best chance I ever had to use whatever punch there is in me. It will get me away from routine

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work and let me use some of my own ideas. Just now, while I'm waiting for reassignment, nothing could suit me better. To-morrow we'd better move into that small room off the telephone room, and I'll go over your files. . . ."

Moving around the room he was off now on a tide of plans. Anne looked at herself in the mirror over the mantel and smiled. He had said he was proud of her. Nothing was as big as that fact. It didn't matter if already in his thoughts he was running the new department. She didn't mind, not even if he began to give her orders from the start. Because she wanted him to succeed more than she wanted to succeed herself. And he had said he was proud of her! Besides —

"I think I can keep up with him," she smiled at herself in the mirror.

CHAPTER XIV

SUMMER had passed, New York had had its two wild peace celebrations and Thanksgiving was over when Anne came home alone one afternoon and let herself into their apartment. She had had an unusually busy day, she was tired and a trifle forlorn. Julia made her tea and lighted a companionable little fire in the grate.

As Anne drank her tea she tried to put out of her mind the thought of business and the day's activities. She had had the busiest summer possible, and, she told herself, the happiest. She and Roger had worked tremendously hard, now and then snatching a week-end for play; but their days had been packed with work that more and more absorbed them both. She had scarcely realized how much happiness she had got out of their work together until this moment when she sat there in the quietness of the room and

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knew that they had come to the end of one chapter and were at the beginning of another. For Roger had been sent for to come to Washington. What that summons meant she did not know. Roger had been quite excited over it and rather mysterious, but he admitted that in all probability he was to be sent over to France.

She had seen him off smilingly, although she knew that she should miss him, if he went to France, more now than before. For they had been so close to each other during this past summer. Never in their married life had they known such companionship, never before had they had so deep an understanding of each other. It was as if for the first time they had begun to see the possibilities of marriage that sprang from comradeship, mutual respect and mutual interests. The long talks they had had in the evenings over some new project in hand, the action and reaction of their two minds bent to one task, had made the days full of a genuine zest. Of course, she should go on, in case Roger went away, but she should go on rather limpingly. That morning she had had

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a letter from Roger, from the tone of which she knew he was as happy as a boy.

"It's a man's world," she said to herself rather sadly. "The big things to do are theirs. . . ."

She went on thinking, planning her life for the next six months. If Roger went away, perhaps she might invite Ricky to come and stay with her. She had grown to like and respect Ricky and she believed it was mutual. Then, perhaps, during the winter she might take a business course. Yes, she could keep busy enough; and there was nothing she was afraid of, now.

She had reached this point when Julia came in with a telegram. She tore it open and read:

"Meet eight o'clock train to-night, Pennsylvania station. Big news. ROGER."

It must be big news if he couldn't wait to get home with it! She felt her certainty confirmed: Roger was going to France. Big news could mean nothing else.

As he came up the long stairs from the train platform two hours later, she saw that his face was

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radiant, and her heart sank, even as she told herself that she was a beast to grudge him his happiness. As he found her among the crowd he pressed her arm against his side, but all he said was: "Glad you wore that hat. Nice hat! Jove, but I'm hungry!"

They were crossing the great rotunda when she could not stand it to wait another minute. "Roger, you'd better tell me now," she said.

He bent a little to look under her hat. "Anne, how would you like to go to France!"

She stopped short regardless of the general traffic, her eyes opening wide. "What do you mean?"

"Just this: the Government is going to do a certain amount of reconstruction work in France, and they've asked a few of the big contractors to furnish picked men to help out. Of course Leavitt suggested me. I was in line for that job anyway, and there wasn't any question of my getting the assignment. But I wanted you to have a chance at the big work over there, too. And so Leavitt and I put our heads together, and we've got you on the American Committee. You are to sail as soon as your pass-

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port comes through. What do you think of that? Pretty good, eh? ”

Anne felt smitten dumb from sheer astonishment. She stood staring at Roger, a star-like rapture in her eyes.

“ If you look like that everybody will think I’ve just asked you to marry me,” he chuckled.

“ It can’t be true! ” she finally whispered.

“ Well, it is! Come on, don’t block the traffic. Of course, we don’t go over on the same boat, but we’ll both get there about the same time, and we’ll manage a few little old good times in between bouts of work. You’ll be crazy about the Committee’s program, Anne. You’ll just eat it up. And I’ll bet you can give ’em some pointers, too. You ought to have heard me telling ’em about what you’ve done. The boss wrote an all-right letter, too.”

“ Oh, Roger, don’t say anything more,” she sighed, “ until I get it through my head that it’s true! I thought I was going to be left at home — I was going to take a business course, and have Ricky to live

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with me — and now, I'm going to France! You're sure you're not mistaken, Roger? ”

He tucked her hand under his arm as they moved out of the station. “ Mistaken? I should say not! Do you think I want to go to France and leave my partner at home? ”

His partner! She felt, as she walked along beside him, as if they had discovered the secret rhythm of the world, and were moving joyously in touch with it.

THE END



**This book is under no circumstances to be
taken from the Building**

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